

*Down
Stream*



HUYSMANS

St. Olaf College Library



Gift of Lloyd E. Smith

DOWN STREAM

Down Stream

[*A vau-l'Eau*]

AND OTHER WORKS

Including MARTHE, A DISH OF SPICES (*Le Drageoir aux Épices*), CRITICAL PAPERS (from *Certains* and *L'Art Moderne*), and a *Twenty-Year-After Preface* (*To A Rebours*).

BY

J. K. Huysmans

From the French
with a Critical Study by
SAMUEL PUTNAM



CHICAGO
PASCAL COVICI, *Publisher*
MCMXXVII

PQ 2309
H4A662

COPYRIGHT, 1927, BY
PASCAL COVICI, PUBLISHER, INC.

PRINTED IN THE U. S. A. BY
THE CUNEO PRESS, INC., CHICAGO

CONTENTS

	PAGE
TRANSLATOR'S WORD	ix
MARTHE	1
DOWN STREAM (<i>A vau-l'Eau</i>)	115
A DISH OF SPICES (<i>Le Drageoir aux Épices</i>) .	187
Japanese Rococo	192
Repeated Theme	193
Red Cameo	194
Declaration of Love	196
La Reine Margot	197
Rubens' Fair	200
Cowardice	203
Claudine	206
The Red Herring	220
Chlorotic Ballad	221
Variation on a Known Air	223
Ecstasy	226
Ballad in Honor of My So	
Sweet Torment	227
The Left Bank	229
To Master François Villon	239

[v]

	PAGE
Adriaen Brouwer	242
Cornelius Bega	249
The Enameler	255
CRITICAL PAPERS (From <i>Certains</i> and <i>L'Art</i>	
<i>Moderne</i>	263
Of Dilettantism	265
Gustave Moreau	271
Degas	276
Felicien Rops	282
TWENTY-YEAR-AFTER PREFACE (To <i>A Rebours</i>) 317	

TRANSLATOR'S WORD



TRANSLATOR'S WORD

“OW, MOREOVER, is one to appreciate, in its entirety, the work of a writer, if one does not take him from his beginnings, if one does not follow him, step by step; how, above all, is one to form an idea of the progress of Grace in a soul, if one suppresses all trace of its passage, if one effaces the footprints it has left?”

This sentence, lifted from Huysmans' *Twenty-Year-After Preface to A Rebours*, written after the author had fled from a badly cooked steak to the bosom of the Church, from Schopenhauer to Christ, might be employed as an apology, if apology were necessary, for the printing, in English translation, of the works to be encountered in this volume.

There will be found here Huysmans' first published work, *Le Drageoir aux Épices* (*A Dish of Spices*), a book of prose poems, written in his initial period, while he was still very much under the influence of Baudelaire. There will be found, also, his first novel, *Marthe*, which, followed shortly by the Goncourts' *La Fille Elisa*, was, really, the first of a

TRANSLATOR'S WORD

long series of French naturalistic romances dealing with the same "unpleasant" theme. There is *A vau-l'Eau* (*Down Stream*), that "Iliad of indigestion," as the late James Gibbons Huneker called it, or "the story of a man who couldn't get a beefsteak in Paris cooked as he wanted it," an opus which the American critic characterizes as "the typical Huysmans tale." There are a number of critical papers from *Certains*, which Huysmans himself, as his biographer, Gustave Coquiote, informs us, always regarded as his best book. Included in these is the rutilant essay on Felicien Rops, the high-water-mark of Huysmans' genius as a word-carver. Finally, there is the *Twenty-Year-After Preface*, one of the most interesting soul-documents in modern literature, to which are added the chapter (Chapter VI.) omitted from the current (John Howard) translation of *Against the Grain*—"that terrible Sixth Chapter," as the author later called it—and the brief passage unaccountably deleted from the otherwise excellent Keene Wallis rendering of *Down There* (*Là-Bas*).

The later Huysmans, of the Catholic period—*En Route*, *The Cathedral*, *The Oblate*, etc.—has been translated, as well as the Huysmans of the middle period, represented by *Against the Grain* and *Down There*, the period during which, as the retrospective *Preface* assures us, the "subterranean work of Grace" was being accomplished in the novelist's soul. The works to be found in this volume, it has seemed to me and to my publisher, serve to round out our view,

DOWN STREAM

at once, of Huysmans the man and Huysmans the writer, the two as the writer insists, being inseparable. Another volume or two might be added to the list of Huysmans translations, including, possibly, *Sac-au-dos*, the tale that appeared in *Les Soirées de Médan*, as well as *Les Soeurs Vatard* and the *Croquis parisiens*. These, if we add *En Ménage*, which, for reasons having to do with literary history, should be done some day, would about complete the task of rendering Huysmans into English. But as it is, I believe that the present volume and those which have gone before will suffice to afford the world of English-speaking culture a view of this writer who, Havelock Ellis tells us, possessed "the most intense vision of the modern world" and who, as the same commentator remarks, "will surely retain to the last the tincture of Parisian modernity."

* * *

DOWN STREAM has seemed to be the title for the collection. The phrase will be found not merely in *A vau-l'Eau*, but in *Marthe*. Huysmans, it must be remembered, started out as a disciple of Schopenhauer. His early philosophy, that philosophy which drove him eventually into a Trappist monastery, when he discovered that "the German had said no more than Job or Thomas a Kempis," will be found summed up in the concluding sentence of *A vau-l'Eau*: *Seul le pire arrive*. Both M. Folantin and

TRANSLATOR'S WORD

Marthe drift constantly, hopelessly *down stream*. Each goes, inevitably, from bad to worse. Each is a study, strikingly modern in vividness and approach, of the disintegration of a human soul.

* * *

We cannot understand Huysmans, unless we understand the two influences contending in the man. Huysmans, like Flaubert, was the victim of a split personality. On one side, he was a realist; on the other, a rebel against realism. We find his realistic inclinations expressed, with particular force, in his predilection for "the painting of real life." On the other hand, even in painting, he liked those artists who, like Gustave Moreau and Felicien Rops, fled from the real into "the tumultuous spaces of nightmares and of dreams." In Flaubert's case, the conflict was never solved; and as a result, we have, over against *Madame Bovary* and the *Sentimental Education*, *Salambo* and *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*. In Huysmans, we see the conflict caught up and, in a manner, rebelliously solved in *A Rebours*, though the solution is not fully apparent until the opening chapters of *En Route*, ten years later, when Durtal suddenly wakes to find himself, without knowing how, a believer. The "explosion" (the word is a favorite with Huysmans) had occurred. Here, again, the man and the writer are one.

The conflict, in Huysmans' case, may, possibly, be

DOWN STREAM

explained by the two opposing literary influences under which he fell, at the outset of his career: Baudelaire and Zola. The Zola influence is apparent in *Marthe* and *A van-l'Eau*, the Baudelairean in *Le Drageoir aux Épices*. And these are the two threads which we find picked up in *A Rebours*. M. Folantin, an "old office hack," as l'Abbé Mugnier (Preface to *Pages catholiques*) calls him, "who curses fate on account of a smoky lamp or a spoiled dish," a "Schopenhauer of the office, the furnished room and the boarding-house table," has become the equally pessimistic, though more aristocratic, Des Esseintes. The latter, however, is not content to remain in a state of hopeless pessimistic abandonment. He seeks an escape through the medium of the artificial—perfumes, flowers, precious stones, the gamey literature of the Latin decadence, etc. And in this "taste for spices," we have the Baudelairean motive, the motive of Huysmans' own prose poems. It was this side which was, in the end, to prevail. Des Esseintes, we are told, in the backward-looking *Preface* "has passed on to Durtal his taste for spices." Until, finally, life becomes unbearable outside that Church where, alone, was to be found the pungency sought. Huysmans' conversion, Coquiot, who knew him fairly well, assures us, was a literary one. It represented, I personally believe, a revolt against a "stifling" * realism,

* The frequency with which this figure occurs in Huysmans is striking. I quote a few examples from the *Twenty-Year-After Preface* and the opening chapters of *Là-Bas*:

TRANSLATOR'S WORD

a revolt that is so sharply outlined in that first chapter of *Là Bas*. It was a flight toward a super, a preternatural (if you like, a metaphysical) realism, a realism more piquant to the senses, in that it was above and beyond the purely physical senses. Huysmans, in all his works, remains the art-critic, the critic working in the medium of the novel. Understand this, and you understand him better. Had Huysmans lived today, he would, I believe, have comprehended the thing for which the Super-realists are—or were—groping. Of one thing I am sure, he would not have cared for Elmer Gantry!

* * *

One word as to *A vau-l'Eau*. This tale has a distinct biographical interest. Huysmans himself, for thirty-two years most faithful of clerks in a government office (even winning a decoration for his fidelity) must himself have led much such a life as that

"I was seeking, vaguely an escape from a blind alley in which I was suffocating."

"*A Rebours*, which freed me from a form of literature without visible outlet, by giving me a little air."

"The need I felt of opening the windows, of fleeing an environment in which I was stifling."

"The stifling language . . . of realism."

"To seek, afar, a region with more air and one not so flat."

"Its novels without doors and without windows."

[xiv]

DOWN STREAM

of M. Folantin. If you don't believe it, read the chapter on Huysmans and his office in Coquiot's *Le Vrai Huysmans*. One can imagine him saying to himself something like this: "I will imagine a man, a bachelor like myself, subject to all the annoyances of a poverty-straightened bachelordom and, like myself, harnessed to a daily treadmill in an office. I will imagine such a man, minus the art which is my salvation, minus my taste for literature. A man, like myself, beset by a turbulent stomach and unable to find a decent meal in all Paris." Take this formula and dilute, or precipitate, with Schopenhauer, and you have—DOWN STREAM. The result is one of the most moving pictures of loneliness ever drawn, the (if you will) neurasthenic loneliness of the individual who flees all crowds, only to discover what the late Lord Byron called "the solitude of the crowd"—but who, unlike the late Lord Byron, really did discover that gnawing solitude. And at the end, we even come upon the first hint of a Catholic propensity, in M. Folantin's reflections on the death of his cloistered aunt.

It was Huneker's opinion that Huysmans was always a Catholic, and that his was not a conversion but a return. There may be, and doubtless is, some truth in this; but I am inclined to the view that Huysmans was, simply, staging an escape from Zola and his school, that he was merely going back to Baudelaire, Des Esseintes and the *Dish of Spices*. Ellis remarks that Huysmans' work is a prolongation of the

TRANSLATOR'S WORD

Fleurs du mal in prose. And does not l'Abbé Mugnier, with wholly delightful naïveté, inform us that the ways of God are sometimes *peu classiques*—not as classic as they might be?

S. P.

Chicago, April 10, 1927.

MARTHE
A Girl of the Streets



*"I write what I see, what I feel and
what I have lived through, the best
I can, and that is all there is to it."*

Foreword to MARTHE



FOREWORD



PRINTED at Brussels for Jean Gay, Publisher, the 12th day of September, 1876, by Felix Callewaert, père, Printer," this book was placed on sale the 1st of October following, at Brussels. ¶

About the middle of the month of August of the same year I found myself in that city, having come there to supervise the printing of *Marthe*, when I learned that M. de Goncourt was about to publish a novel the subject of which was somewhat like my own: *la Fille Elisa*. I may add that the rumors announcing the appearance of this book for the 1st of November, 1876, proved to be false, since *la Fille Elisa* was not placed on sale until the 20th of March, 1877, at Paris.

However this may be, I was afraid of being anticipated, and so, hastening the printed toilet of *Marthe*, I caused to be inscribed upon its final page the birth certificate quoted above.

This volume, the first novel that I wrote, was exhausted in a few days. The high price which it soon attained did not permit its purchase except on the part of collectors of rare books. M. Derveau* has

*Publisher of the second (first Parisian) edition of *Marthe*, 1879.

MARTHE

thought that those persons who were interested in the *Soeurs Vatard* would, perhaps, like to be able to procure, without too much trouble, this naturalistic novel by the same author. Such is the motive which has lead to the French edition of *Marthe*.

I have had, I confess, the intention of making it over from top to bottom; it has seemed to me that I should write it now in a language less tortuous and easier to read, but I have decided that it was better for it to remain as it was, preserving its youthful defects and audacities. I have especially desired that no one should be able to accuse me of having changed a word since the subsequent appearance of the novel of M. de Goncourt.

I believe it would be useless to enter into any discussion at the present time regarding the subject which it has pleased me to treat here. The indignant clamors to which latter-day idealists have given vent since the appearance of *Marthe* and the *Soeurs Vatard* leave me unmoved.

I write what I see, what I feel, and what I have lived through, the best I can, and that is all there is to it.

This explanation is not an excuse; it is, simply, a statement of the end which I pursue in art.



I

LOOK HERE, little one," said Gingenet, stretched upon the urine-colored velvet of the bench, "you haven't a bad voice, you are pretty, and you have a certain stage presence, but that's not all. Listen to me. Its an old ham, a roustabout of the provinces and abroad, who is talking to you, an old wolf of the stage, as steady on the boards as a sailor on the sea. Well! You're not popular enough yet with the mob! That will come, little dear, but you're not quite there yet with your hips, you don't come in quite right on the *boom* of the bass-drum. Look here, look at me, I've got legs like a pair of warped tweezers, arms like vine-stalks; when I open my mouth its like the frog of a wine-vat, and I am just about as light on my feet as a ton of bricks, but bingo! when the cymbal clashes, I shake a leg, rasp out the last word of the stanza, gargle a false note, and there you are; I've got the public in the palm of my hand. That's what you've got to do. Come on, warble your ditty, and I'll show you the fine points as you go along. One, two, three, attention, your daddy's got his auricular tube open, your daddy's listening."

MARTHE

"Here, Mademoiselle Marthe, here's a letter which the door-woman told me to hand you," said a big girl with a burr and a snivel in her voice.

"Ah! That's fine," cried the young one. "Look here, Ginginet, what I've just received. Nice, isn't it?"

The comedian unfolded the paper and the corners of his lips mounted to the flaps of his nose, revealing gums smeared with red and producing a crack in the mask of rouge and powder with which his face was varnished.

"It's in verse!" he exclaimed, visibly alarmed. "In other words, the one who sends it is some fellow without a sou. A well-to-do-gentleman doesn't send verse!"

The players had reassembled during this conversation. It was as cold as the north-pole that night, and the back-stage corridors, with their drafts of air, were glacial. All the actors were huddled about a coke fire that flamed in the chimney.

"What's that?" inquired an actress, insolently *de-colletée* from head to foot.

"Hear ye," said Ginginet, and he read, amid general attention, the following sonnet:

TO A SINGER

*A fife that squalls and hisses with dry throat;
Sniffing bassoon; an old man who tries to spit
His teeth down the trombone's neck; the violin? It
Sounds like an ancient rebeck's rasping note.*

DOWN STREAM

*A mighty flageolet — on its beak you dote;
A surly cornet, a bass-drum like to split:
Such is, with a conductor very fit—
Tun-bellied, scrofulous, an ugly bloat—*

*The theatre-orchestra, which holds in check
A lady apt for any amorous list:
On you, my only love, my sole delight, this fleck.*

*Each night you follow —'tis your infamous duty;
Eyes shut, arms down and mouth made to be
kissed,
I see you smile on cads, O Queen of Beauty!*

"And it isn't signed!"

"Listen, Ginginet, that's what you call handing the orchestra leader a sweet one; ought to show him those vers-s-es; that will take him down a peg, the old catgut-scraper!"

"Come, ladies, on the stage," cried a gentleman clad in a black hat and a blue macfarlane. "Take your places, the overture is beginning!"

The women arose, tossed cloaks over their nude shoulders, shook themselves with a collective shiver — and, followed by the men, who had interrupted their pipes or their bezique game, filed through the little door which gave access to the stage by way of the wings.

The fireman on duty was at his post, and although he was half-dead with cold, there were flames in his eyes when he saw what was under the petticoats of some of the danseuses scattered through this revue. The stage manager gave three taps, and the curtain slowly rose, revealing an auditorium filled with people.

There is no doubt that the more interesting part of the show was not upon the stage but in the auditorium. The theatre run by Bobino, commonly known as Bobinche, was not filled, like those of Montparnasse, Grenelle and other ancient suburbs, with working men who desired to listen, seriously, to a drama. Bobino had for clientele the students and the artists, a clamourous and mocking race if ever there was one. They had not come into this hovel, tapestried with cheap wall paper, to be transported by heavy melodramas or light revues; they had come to yell, to laugh and to interrupt the piece—in short, to be amused! And so, the curtain had barely risen when the brayings began; but Ginginet was not the man to be disturbed by a little thing like that; his long dramatic career had accustomed him to hoots and hubbubs. He graciously saluted those who interrupted him, entering into conversation with them and interspersing his line with jests addressed to the boisterous ones; in short, he ended by getting a hand for himself. The show however, went badly enough; it went lame from the second scene. The auditorium was once more in a tempest. It was particularly delighted

DOWN STREAM

by the entrance of an enormous actress with a nose pickled in a sea of fat. The musical passage ejaculated from the spout of this human tub was met with great reinforcements on the part of the audience, to the tune of "*larifla, fla, fla.*" The poor woman was dumfounded and did not know whether to hold her ground or to flee. And then Marthe appeared, and the uproar died down.

She was charming, in the costume which she herself had cut out of silk and moire remnants. A rose-colored cuirass seamed with false pearls, a cuirass of an exquisite rose hue, that tenuous, almost ethereal hue which is only to be found in stuffs from the East, encircled her hips, which could scarcely be contained within their prison of silk; with her helmet of opulently red hair, her titillating lips, humid, voracious, red, she was enchanting, irresistibly seductive!

The two most intrepid hucksters, who answered one another from orchestra pit to gallery, had ceased their cries; "The ring breaks, but your keys are safe, five centimes, one sou! Orgeat, lemonade, beer!" Sustained by the prompter and by Ginginet, Marthe was applauded excessively. As soon as her ballad was ended, the tumult broke out again, more furiously than ever. The painter seated in the lower stalls and the student in a red oil-skin, who was roosting up above in the "hen-house," bawled themselves hoarse in the finest fashion imaginable, with a wealth of jests and quibbles, to the great joy of the spectators, whom the piece was boring to tears.

MARTHE

Stationed at the foot-lights, near one of the wings, Marthe looked over the auditorium and asked herself which of these young fellows might have sent her the letter. But all eyes were turned upon her; all were blazing in honor of her throat; it was impossible for her to discover, among all these admirers, the one who had sent the sonnet.

The curtain fell without her curiosity being satisfied.

The following evening, the actors were in a surly humor; they were expecting a new outbreak, and the director who acted as stage manager, owing to the absence of funds, was promenading feverishly up and down the stage, waiting for the curtain to go up.

He was suddenly tapped on the shoulder and, turning, found himself face to face with a young man, who grasped his hand and, very calmly, remarked:

"You're quite well today, I presume?"

"But . . . but yes . . . not bad . . . and you?"

"Oh, so so, thanks. And now, let's understand each other. You don't know me, and I don't know you. Well! I am a journalist, and I intend to write a wonderful article on your theatre."

"Ah! Enchanted, ravished, I assure you! But for what journal do you write?"

"For the *Monthly Review*."

"Don't know it. When does it come out?"

"Generally every month."

"Well . . . won't you sit down?"

DOWN STREAM

"Thank you, but I don't think I'll take advantage of your invitation."

And the young man was already in the greenroom, where actors and actresses were chattering together.

He was a clever fellow, this newcomer! He said a friendly word to one, a friendly word to another and promised everybody a gracious article, especially Marthe, whom he gazed upon with so greedy an eye that she had little difficulty in divining the fact that he was the author of the letter.

He came back a number of days following and paid her court; the short of it was, he succeeded, one evening, in dragging her home with him.

Ginginet, who was watching the young man's manoeuvres, fell into a furious rage, which he poured out in great torrents on the bosom of Bourdeau, his colleague and friend.

The two were seated at table in a wine shop of the obscurer sort, drinking a pint together. If the truth must be told, Ginginet had succeeded, since afternoon, in painting his gullet one of the liveliest of reds; it seemed that he had sand-dunes in his throat, which he was attempting to irrigate with great waves of wine. His head soon sank, little by little, over the table, until his nose dipped in his glass, and, without addressing his companion, who was snoring away more drunk than he, if anything, he belched forth into a monologue, stippled and minced by a series of starts and hiccups.

"Beast, that little one, nothing but a beast, ah! but

MARTHE

yes! to take a lover, that's all right, if he is rich; otherwise, better stick to Ginginet's old mug—not handsome, that's true—Ginginet—not young that's also true—but an artist! An artist! And she prefers to him a sweetie who makes verses! a good trade to starve by! that's plain enough, like my voice—not this evening though—I'm as hoarse as everything—that reminds me of the little song I used to sing at Amboise, when it storms! Hey! Bourdeau, listen here, I tell you glories, ah!—that song about "my wife and my umbrella." Maybe they weren't stupid, those stanzas! as if a baby-doll and a whalebone-landau were not the same thing! Both turn on you and both desert you when it storms! Hey! Bourdeau, listen here, I tell you I was a father to her, the most generous of fathers, who didn't mind her winking an eye at the rich young fellows, but for the poor ones, the ones up a tree, like this one, faugh! Be blowed! the devil! I become a serious father then."

And moved to the point of tears, Ginginet emphasized his soliloquy with a vigorous blow of his fist on the table, which made the wine in his glass foam and spattered his old peeled mask of a face with large red drops.

"It's raining out doors, its raining in doors," he went on, "goodnight everybody, I'm going to bed. Hey! Bourdeau, hey! lazy bones! Get up, its your old pal calling you! The one who used to sing at Amboise, I don't know what tune anymore.— Ah! zounds! What a house and what a bank account I had then!

DOWN STREAM

And what a misfortune! To think that all that is gone at the same time as my hair! As for you," he cried to the garçon, "here are a few live ones; better cover 'em; there are five pints to pay for and good luck to all good fellows! As for the bourgeois, fiddle sticks on them!"

And saying this, he grasped Bourdeau by the left arm. The latter stumbled out after him, in his old shoes, singing like a nightingale through his nose, inflating his belly like a drum, dangling his head like a wild boar and yodeling out, in a what-you-may-call-it voice, a eulogy of old coaches and strong wines!



II



AFTER TEN YEARS of sterile struggles and miseries impatiently borne, Sébastien Landousé, a painter, had at the moment he was beginning to be known by the public, married one Florence Herbier, a worker in imitation pearls. Unfortunately, his health, already shaken by amours and by excessive labours, grew steadily worse from day to day, until, after a malady of the lungs, which kept him flat on his back in bed for six long months, he ended by dying and was buried, for lack of money, in a corner of the potter's field.

Apathetic and weak by temperament, his wife bore up under the blow and went valiantly to work, and when Marthe, his daughter, had attained her fifteenth year and completed her apprenticeship, the mother, in turn, died, and, like her husband, found a chance grave in a cemetery.

Marthe was then earning, as a worker in imitation pearls, a salary of four francs a day, but the trade was an exhausting and unhealthy one, and sometimes she was unable to work at it.

Imitation pearls are made from the scales of the

DOWN STREAM

ablet, pounded and reduced to a sort of paste, which a workman stirs incessantly. The water, the alkali and the scales of the fish are all unsanitary and become a seat of infection when the least heat is present, and so this paste is prepared in a cellar. The older it is, the more precious it is. It is put up in flagons, carefully sealed, and the bath of ammonia and water is renewed from time to time.

As in certain wine-shops, the bottles bear an indication of the year in which they were filled; like the vintage of September, this glittering vintage improves with time. In the absence of labels, one might recognize the young flagons from the older ones by the fact that the former appear to be plated in silver-grey, while the others are laminated with quicksilver. Once this composition is sufficiently dense and sufficiently homogeneous, the worker, with the aid of a blow-pipe, must breathe it into globules of glass, round or oval in shape, in the form of balls or pears, according to the form of the pearl, washing the whole with spirits of wine, which she likewise breathes in with her blow-pipe. The object of this operation is to dry the glazing; there is nothing to do then, in order to give weight and preserve the foil of the glass, except to drip upon the pearl a few tears of virgin wax. If its water is well silvered with grey, if it is merely what the manufacturer calls a medium article, it is worth, such as it is, from 3 francs to 3 fr. 50.

Marthe passed her days in filling these balls, and

MARTHE

of an evening, when her task was finished, she would go to Montrouge, to the home of her mother's brother, a lute-maker, or she would return to her own lodging and, frozen by the cold of the desolate place, would go to bed as quickly as possible, endeavoring to slay, by means of sleep, the melancholy of the long light nights.

She was, otherwise, a singular girl. Strange ardors; a disgust for her trade; a hatred of misery; an unhealthy aspiration towards the unknown; a despair that was not resignation; the poignant memory of evil days, days without bread, by the bed side of her sick father, along with the conviction, born of the rancors of a disdained artist, that protection, acquired at the price of all sorts of baseness and niggardliness, is all there is here below; an appetite for wellbeing and for pomp; a morbid languor; a disposition to neurasthenia, which she inherited from her father; a certain instinctive laziness, which she got from her mother, who was so fine in critical moments, so weak when necessity no longer gripped her,—all these qualities and predispositions swarmed and gushed, furiously, within her.

The workshop, unfortunately, was not adapted to strengthening her hard-pressed courage or to relieving virtue in distress.

A workshop of women is the anteroom of Saint-Lazare. Marthe was not slow in becoming accustomed to the conversation of her companions. Bent all day long over a bowl of scales, between the blowing of

two pearls, they would chatter endlessly. To tell the truth, their conversation varied but little. Always, it revolved about a man. Such and such a girl was living with a gentleman, who was very well-to-do; she received so much a month, and all proceeded to admire her new medallion, her rings, her earrings; all were jealous of her and brought pressure to bear upon their own lovers to provide them with similar trifles. A girl is lost as soon as she sees other girls of this sort. The conversations of school boys are not to be compared with those of workwomen; the workshop is a touchstone of the virtues; gold there is rare, brass is abundant. A girl does not stumble, as the novelists say, from love, through a bewilderment of the senses, but, rather, through pride and, to a degree, through curiosity. Marthe listened to the exploits of her girl friends, to tales of their gentle and deadly combats, with wide eyes and a mouth that burned with fever. The others laughed at her and had nicknamed her "the little canary." To hear them, all men were perfect idiots! One girl had made a fool of a man the night before and had kept him waiting for an appointment; he had only been the hungrier for her. Another was trifling on her lover, who loved her the more, the less faithful she was. All deceived their hangers-on, or spinned them around like tops, and all gloried in the fact! Marthe, already, no longer blushed at the smutty remarks which she heard all about her; she blushed, instead, at not being the equals of her companions in arrogance. She no longer hesitated to give

herself; she was merely waiting a propitious occasion. Moreover, the life that she was leading was unbearable to her. Never to laugh! Nor to be amused! Never to have any distraction, except such as she might find in her uncle's house, a hut that was rented by the week, where uncle, aunt, children, dogs and cats piled in pellmell. Of an evening they played lotto, that ideally stupid game, and marked the winning fives with trouser-buttons. On fête days they would drink a glass of warm wine between games, and sometimes they would shell roast chestnuts. These joys of the poor exasperated her, and she preferred to go to the house of one of her girl friends, who was living in concubinage with a man. But both of them were young and never grew tired of kissing each other. The situation of a third party in such duets is always ridiculous, and so she would leave them more saddened and provoked than ever! Oh! She had had enough of this solitary life, of this eternal Tantalus-like punishment, of this invincible pruriency for caresses and for gold! She must put an end to it, and she began to reflect how she should set about it. She was followed every evening by an elderly man, who promised her all sorts of marvels, while a young man, who lived in the same house on the floor above, would brush past her on the staircase and gently beg pardon, when his arm happened to graze her own. Her choice was not in doubt. The old man won the day on the scales of her heart, seeing that the young one had nothing to throw in except his good looks and his youth, while

DOWN STREAM

the other tossed on the scales the sword of Brennus; well being and gold! He had also about him a certain tone, as of a well bred man, which flattered the young girl, for the reason that her companions had as lovers none but boors, counter-jumpers or hardware clerks. She yielded. . . having no other excuse than those smoldering passions which make one cry out with pain and cause one, finally, to abandon body and soul. . . she yielded and was profoundly disgusted. The following day, nevertheless, she related to her comrades the story of her ruin, which she already regretted! But she put on an appearance of being proud of her prowess and, in the presence of the whole workshop, took the arm of the old black-guard who had bought her! But her courage was not of long duration; her nerves rebelled; and one evening, she showed the old man and his money the door and resolved to resume her former mode of life. It is the story of those who are habitual smokers and who, sick with disgust, swear that they will never begin again, but who do begin again as soon as their stomachs consent to be over-ruled. After one pipe another; after one lover a second. This time, she wanted to love a young man, as though that were something she could direct to her liking! That one young fellow did love her. . . almost, but he was so gentle and so respectful that she took a pleasure in making him suffer. They ended in separating, by common accord. Oh! then she did like the others: one week, three days, two days, one day satiated her, in

turn, with the weight of importunate caresses. In the meantime, she fell ill, and, as soon as she was well again, was abandoned by her lover. To crown her misfortunes, the physician expressly ordered her not to continue her trade of pearl-blower. What was she to do, then? What was to become of her? She was in want, want all the more oppressive by reason of the good times she remembered having had with her first man, a memory that incessantly came back to her. She tried her luck in other professions, but the low salaries which she was paid dissuaded her from fresh efforts. One fine evening, hunger rolled her in the mud of the gutter; and she sprawled there at full length and never rose again.

From then on, she went down stream, eating as best she could on her chance earnings, suffering from hunger when the north wind whistled. She had finished her apprenticeship in this new trade; she had passed as a vassal into the hands of the first comer; she had become a worker in human passions. One evening, she met, in a dance hall, where she had gone to seek her fortune in the company of a big trollop with a dumpy figure and eyes the color of sienna, a young man, who appeared to be in quest of adventure. Marthe, with her currant-red mouth, her cajoling little pout when he teased her, her general air of a bar-room goddess and her languishing but inflaming glance, completely won this naïve lad, and took him home with her. This accident soon became a habit. They even ended by living together. Driven from

DOWN STREAM

cheap lodging-house to cheap lodging-house, they finally took refuge in a frightful hole, situated in the rue du Cherche-Midi.

This house had all the appearance of a den. A rusty door, zebra-striped with beef-blood and ochre, a long dark corridor, the walls of which oozed drops as black as coffee, a weird stair, which cried out under every imprint of foot, heavy with the unclean scents of sinks and the odor of latrines, the doors of which fanned in every breeze. It was on the third floor of this dwelling that they selected a room with a flowered wall paper, frayed in spots and dropping, through other spots, a fine rain of plaster. In this room there were not even the usual vases in alabaster and painted porcelain, the clock without hands, the fly-specked mirror; there was not even that last luxury of furnished rooms, the colored engraving of Napoleon, wounded in the foot and remounting his horse; the dismantled walls urinated little yellow drops, and the floor, with its scarlet-varnished slabs, was like a sickly skin mottled with red eruptions. The only furniture was a dirty wooden bed, a table without a drawer, chintz curtains, coal-black and stiff with accumulated filth, a chair without a bottom and an old arm-chair, which rejoiced by itself over by the chimney, smiling through all its crevices and protruding, as though to beard the world, its tongues of black horsehair through all the chinks of its velvet chops.

They stayed there for eight weeks, living by one expedient or another, eating and drinking indescrib-

MARTHE

able things. Marthe was beginning to long for another lot, when she discovered that she was a number of months pregnant. She burst into tears, confessed to her lover that the child was not his, told him that she would give him his liberty and, by this stratagem, succeeded in attaching him to her, hopelessly. She made an agreement with the poor wretch that they should deprive themselves of all unnecessary things in order to be able to lay aside the sum needed for her accouchement.

But they were spared the trouble. A fall on the stair accelerated her delivery. One clear night in December, when they had not a sou, neither one nor the other of them, she felt the first pangs of childbirth. The young fellow dashed precipitately out of doors, in quest of a midwife, whom he soon brought back with him.

"But you're freezing here!" cried this Providence in a bonnet, as she entered the room. "We must light a fire."

Fearing that, if this woman divined their misery, she would demand her fee in advance, Marthe told her lover to go look for the key to the wood cellar—it must be in the pocket of her dress or on the mantel-piece. Her lover was so stupefied that he was on the point of searching for this mythical key in earnest, when Marthe suddenly grew stiff, gave a long drawn out groan and fell back, white and inert, upon the pallet. —She had just given birth to a little daughter.

DOWN STREAM

The midwife cleaned the infant, wrapped it up and went away, announcing that she would come back the next morning at daybreak.

The night was unbelievably melancholy. The girl groaned and complained of not being able to sleep; the lad, dying with cold, sat in the arm-chair and rocked the brat, which wailed in a lamentable fashion. About three o'clock, the snow began falling, and the wind bellowed in the corridor, shaking the loose windows, buffeting the candle, which dripped forlornly, and blowing ashes from the grate about the room. The infant was frozen and hungry. As a crowning misfortune, its swaddling clothes slipped off and, rendered clumsy by the icy squalls which froze his hands, the young fellow could not succeed in getting them on again. As a last trivially horrible detail, this fireless room made him sick, the poor little thing crying louder and louder as he ceased to rock it.

The result of this evening was, both the child and the man died, the one of cold and exposure, the other of a peerless dropsy, which the experience of the night had hastened. The girl alone emerged, fresher and more enticing than ever. She lived for some time by what she could pick up at the street corners, until one night when, discouraged and unable to find any longer the mire in which to gain her bread, she happened to meet an old-time comrade of the factory. The latter had had no need to strike a reef; she had foundered in the open sea, body and cargo. This incident decided Marthe's fate. The other boasted of the

MARTHE

profits she was making in her new way of life. Marthe drank two glasses too many, accompanied her friend to the entrance of the lair and hazarded a foot inside, believing that she would be able to retrace her steps whenever it seemed good to her.

The following day, she had become the recognized inmate of a house of prostitution.



III



ALTHOUGH she still drank enough to kill her, in order to forget the abominable life she was leading, she had not become resigned to this abdication of herself, to this inescapable jail, to this odious trade, which admitted of neither repugnance nor fatigue.

She had not been able to forget as yet, in the depressing stupor of drunken carousals, that terrible life which hurls you, from eight o'clock in the evening to three o'clock in the morning, upon a divan; which forces you to smile, whether you are gay or sad, sick or not; which forces you to stretch out beside a frightful drunkard, to submit to him and to satisfy him; a life more terrifying than all the gehennas dreamed by the poets, than all the galleys, all the convict-ships; for there exists no state in life, however debasing, however miserable it may be, which can equal, in abject labors and sinister fatigues, the trade of these poor wretches!

The anguish, the disgust of the girl were revived this evening. She had been lying for twenty minutes buried in a pile of cushions, appearing to be listening

to the cackle of her companions, trembling at the least sound of footsteps.

She felt disheartened and discouraged, as though she had just emerged from a prolonged debauch. For moments, her grief would seem to be appeased, and she would view, with a dazzled eye, the splendors that surrounded her. Those whorls of candles, those walls draped in dull-red satin, embossed in flowers of white silk, which glittered like beads of silver, danced in front of her eyes and sparkled like white stars against the deep purple of a furnace. Then her sight would grow calm again, and she would behold herself in a big framed looking-glass, impudently prostrate upon a bench, coiffed as though she were going to a ball, her flesh set off by ruffles of strongly scented lace.

She could not believe that this image was her own. She regarded with astonishment her powdered arms, her coal-blackened eyebrows, her lips red as raw meat, her legs clad in stockings of cerise silk, her timorously heaving bosom, all the distracting enticements of her flesh, shuddering beneath the fripperies of her dressing-gown. Her eyes frightened her; they appeared to her, in their penciled rings, to be bizarrely hollowed out, and she discovered, in their sudden depths, some unknown and childish vulgar expression which made her blush beneath her rouge.

Then, she gazed with stupefaction upon the strange poses of her companions, those droll and common beauties, those provoking chatter-boxes,

DOWN STREAM

those skinny bean-poles, stretched upon their bellies, their heads in their hands, crouched like bitches upon a taboret or clinging, like faded finery, from the corners of divans, their hair built up in all sorts of fashions: waving spirals, frizzled curls, rings and gigantic knots, constellated with white and red marguerites or with fringes of false pearls or done in black or blonde manes, pomaded or sprinkled with a snow of powder.

The sleeveless dressing-gowns, attached to the shoulders by beribboned bits of soft silk, were large and flowing and permitted a glimpse, under their diaphanous width, of enticingly nude bodies.

Jewels twinkled; rubies and paste-stones stopped the passage of threads of light, while, upright in front of a glass, turning her back to the door, a woman, her arms reared, was sinking a pin into the sombre depths of her hair.

Her large gauze dressing-gown mounted with the movement of her arms and left a wide space between its own pale vapor and the granite of her flesh. Her breasts also rose with this movement of her elbows, and their rounded orbs bulged, white and hard, under their frieze of rosettes. A line veering from her neck, which was tossed back a little, broke in the undulant folds which hooped her haunches, and trenched by a deep curve, her rump dropped its snowy rotundities upon a pair of legs which blushed above her garter-circled knees.

And in this parlor, filled to overflowing with the

MARTHE

odors of amber and patchouli, what a hubbub, what an uproar, what a chaos there was! Shouts of laughter burst forth like volleys of rifle-shots, and disputes arose on all sides, drifting, in their precipitous waves, a tumbling mass of ignominious ordures.

Suddenly, the bell rang. Silence fell like an enchantment. Each one sat down, and those who were sleeping upon the benches awoke with a start and rubbed their eyes, forcing themselves to rekindle, for a second, the flame of their glances, while an amorous passenger mounted to the deck, ready to embark.

The door opened, and two young fellows entered the room.

The new girl dropped her head, effacing herself as best she could, seeking to make herself as small as possible, in order not to be remarked, fixing her gaze obstinately on the roses of the rug, while feeling the glances of the young men rummaging over her, under the gas.

Oh! how she despised those who came to see her! She did not know that the majority of those who spent some time with her had merely come there to forget, in the enervation of her couch, certain persistent boredoms, certain bleeding rancors, certain inexhaustible griefs. She did not know that, after having been deceived by women whom they had loved, after having sipped heavy wines in muslin glasses, and having lacerated their lips on the splendor of those glasses, the majority no longer cared to drink any but adulterated vintages from thick mugs of the wine-shops!

DOWN STREAM

One of the men made a sign to her. She did not stir, imploring her companions with a look, but they all laughed and bantered her. Madame alone fixed her with a deadly eye. She was afraid and arose like those mules which, after falling to their knees, hurl themselves forward, suddenly, under the lash of the whip. She stumbled across the parlor, deafened by a hail-storm of cries and bursts of laughter.

She climbed the stair, leaning against the wall and feeling a bitter nausea beat up like a billow in her bosom. A maid opened the door and effaced herself, in order to permit the pair to pass.

He entered and she, falteringly, dropped the heavy portière behind her.

She awoke the next day, drunken with ignominy and with but one object, one idea, to escape from this filthy house and to go forget, somewhere, far away, her unforgettable woes.

The atmosphere of the room, dulled by the musk-heavy emanations of lechery, the padlocked windows, the thick draperies, softened by the glow of coals still rose-red, her bed, disheveled and jumbled by the pil-lagings of the night—all disgusted her to the point of vomiting. Everybody was asleep. She dressed herself, hastily descended the stairs, drew the bolts and hurled herself into the street. Ah! now she could breathe again! She directed her steps by chance, thinking of nothing. She was like one drunk. Suddenly, a perception of her woes gripped her, as she recalled the saturnalia which she was fleeing and the

fact that she was breaking her ban, and she cast about her the eye of a fear-stricken beast.

She found herself, by this time, in the lower part of the boulevard Saint-Michel, when she saw two city-sergeants walking down tranquilly toward the Seine. An indefinable anguish seized her by the throat, and her legs bent under her. It seemed these men must be going to arrest her and lead her away to the station. The sun, which was raining blonde drops upon the tree-bordered asphalt, seemed to be shedding its light on her alone, with the object of showing everyone what she was. She fled into one of those sombre little streets which connect the boulevard with the place Maubert. She stopped to get her breath in one of those corridors which exhale the odor of a cellar, and then resumed her walk. During these few minutes of repose, her distraction had ceased. She now thought of demanding asylum of one of her girl friends, who dwelt in the rue Monge. She rapped futilely on the door, and, upon being assured by the concierge that her friend would be back very soon, she began sauntering up and down the street. She surveyed, with distracted attention, a shop-window, which contained toys, tops, images of Epinal, merry-andrews in wood, little green-glazed plates for the use of children, carved perfumery vials with ground-glass stoppers and white-skin caps, bottles of red ink, packages of needles, wrapped in black paper, with the arms of England in gilt, holy figures and Mangin pencils.

DOWN STREAM

After gazing at this wretched outlay without even seeing it, she came back to the concierge. Her friend had not yet returned.

She began walking once more. An ardent thirst burned in her throat. She paused in front of a wine-merchant's, asking herself if she should enter. She had become more timid than a child. She stood for ten minutes in front of this display, reading in a low voice the labels on the bottles, gazing at the square vials of Danzig brandy with their showers of gold, the litres of orgeat, like congealed oil, the bottles of cognac and of black-currant ratafia, the carboys of rosy cherries, green plums and blonde peaches. She finally pushed open the door, and a winery odor leaped at her throat. She asked the proprietor for a half-litre of wine and a siphon of seltzer water.

It seemed to her there was insolence in the look the *cabaretier* gave her. Was he wondering, he too, from what hulks she had escaped? Worried and ashamed, she took refuge in a small room adjoining the shop.

The proprietor made her wait a quarter of an hour before serving her; then he tossed the order upon the table and hurried out to greet a man who cried, as he pushed the door in:

"A cup of juice, old man, and a crust of plum!"

"Well, so it's you, Monsieur Ginginet."

"Yes, it's me. I've been running around like a greyhound since morning. Just fancy, old fellow, my boss has given me the job of replenishing the personnel of Bobino's theatre. Little pay and stars of the

first magnitude—comets, what! That's his motto. Well, I've been to Rodaln's, to Machut's, to Adolphe's, and I've engaged them. All I need now is a few girls who can sing."

And saying this, Ginginet cut himself a large slice of bread and swallowed several glasses in succession. Between two bumpers, he caught sight of Marthe, who was sitting, sombre and almost sullen, in the depths of the booth. He then began to bring out his back-stage bon mots and to spin his bobbin of courtesies. When he saw an answering smile, he invited her to have a cup of coffee. She refused, but the devilish fellow was so sharp, so jovial, he seemed to be such a good scout, that she ended by striking up a conversation with him. Ginginet looked her over.

"She is superb," he murmured. "With a new costume, she would set the house on fire. She has a seedy and down-and-out look; she must have been up to something silly; maybe she has no home; but if she has the least bit of a voice, I'll engage her on the spot—a sparkler picked up on the barroom-floor! I'll teach her how to sing and act in fifteen days. If she lacks talent, she's pretty, and that's the principal thing in the theatre."

She accepted; she felt that she was saved. Fifteen days afterward she made her début at Bobino's.

This new life pleased her. Like all the unfortunate creatures whom misery and casual employment have dragged through the hutches of prostitution of a large city, she now experienced, despite herself, de-

DOWN STREAM

spite the horrible disgust which had assailed her upon first acquaintance with the life she had left, that strange regret, that terrible malady which leads every woman who once has led such a life to come back and plunge into it again, one day or another.

That miserable and drunken existence, with its lack of sleep, with its perpetual activity, with its come-and-go, with people constantly entering, leaving, coming up or going down stairs, with its fatigues conquered by alcohol and its loud laughter—all this fascinates these wretched ones, with the vertiginous attraction exercised by abysses.

What saved Marthe from a frightful relapse was, first of all, the short time she had spent in such a house, but it was, above all, the distracting life of back-stage, the constant exhibition of herself before the eyes of an enthusiastic public, the haste and jostling every minute, of a night, when she had to change and go on for her part. The fever of the theatre had proved to be, for her, the most effective antidote to the poison which she had absorbed.



IV



PURSUING their way, arm in arm, Marthe and Leo chattered of silly things. They went down the rue de Madame until they reached the Croix-Rouge. ¶ The conversation became more and more stupid. Praises of her costume, her voice, the tittle-tattle of the theatre, questions as to where he lived — all these subjects had been exhausted. A dog watched them, as they went by on the side-walk, and howled without reason; and so, naturally, they spoke of dogs. He preferred cats, while she liked curly bow-bows, those frightful pugs whose chops stink when they have eaten meat or sugar. This discussion soon reached an end. They did not say a word for a number of minutes, when a souse emerged from a side-street knocking against the walls, and they railed for a while against drunkards, then fell silent once more. A city sergeant passed. She felt a shiver down her spine. He endeavored to cheer her up, but she did not appear to be listening. In truth, it was time they were there.

The gas was out. Leo took Marthe's hand and guided her across the court to the door of the cor-

DOWN STREAM

ridor. There they paused, while he lighted a small wax taper, and she perceived the first steps of a stair that wound away in the darkness. When he opened his door, a great coal-fire was to be seen, tinting with red splashes the draperies of a little room and lighting, with sparkling glints, the glass frames of pictures hanging from the walls. Marthe removed her hat and sable cloak and sat down in a big leather arm-chair, which he rolled over to the fire. Sitting cross-legged at her feet, he looked up at her, marveled at her figure, as supple as a reed, and nearly died of desire to kiss her hair, which writhed in light meshes over the roseate snow of her neck. A pin came out, and a spiral fell down over her dress, which was of a green that was almost black, a dress that set upon her like a Japanese robe, outlining the serpentine curve of her throat, the cornice-work of her hips. With her long-lashed dark eyes, splendidly luminous, her lips like live-coals, her rounded cheeks, she resembled thus, minus the costume so magnificently picturesque, Saskia, Rembrandt's first wife, the one of whom Ferdinand Bol has given us a likeness in a marvelous portrait.

Marthe arose.

"Look," she said, "at the people drinking."

And she touched, with the rose-almond of her nail, a copy of Jordaens' "Twelfth-Night King." Then she laughed, open-throatedly, at sight of that monarch, with his crown of straw and hair tumbling down in confusion over the napkin pinned to his

neck. She found diversion in contemplating this tableful of joyous roisterers, who bawled, puffed their pipes and cried out, with all their might: "The king drinks! The king drinks!" Leo had taken her hand and now pointed out to her, as he kissed her, the women of the picture, that big-bellied wench, wiping her child who has just been smelled by a dog, and the two other lankier ones, more of the blonde type, who, all veils cast aside, are laughing as they swill down wines the color of light and beer the color of amber.

She had a swift vision of past merry-makings.

But this passionate opulence of Rubens' carnal debaucheries, these interiors of white and vermilion, this plenitude, this sumptuosity of flesh, these eddying waves of carmine and mother-of-pearl were not able to hold her for long. She viewed, without pausing, various pictures, then stood thoughtful before an engraving of Hogarth's, one of the episodes from the life of courtezans. Those open-hearted jades, that drunken young fellow whose watch is being lifted by a ravishing lass, those boards filled with overturned glasses and with cursing strumpets, spitting in one another's face and brandishing threatening knives, the hussy whose trappings, bodice and petticoats lie rumpled on the ground, and who is putting her half-boots on backward, over her silk stockings, the one with the fly-spotted lips and forehead, one of whose breasts is escaping from her drooping chemise, those two ruffians howling at the door and reflecting the

DOWN STREAM

flame of a candle in a copper plate—all evoked in her certain precise memories; she stood there fascinated, silent, like one who has just come out of a dream, remarking beneath her teeth: "How good that is!"

She sat down once more in the easy chair, while he straddled a *chauffeuse* and stirred the fire. They were disconcerted. She was thinking of her former life. All her memories awakened. The enticements of the brothel, that odor of the prostitute, which she had endeavored to do away with, suddenly reappeared and obsessed her, invincibly. The more closely she watched herself, the oftener did strange words and blunders, expressions which she had wanted to forget, come back and, in spite of her, leap from her lips. She broke off the conversation which Leo had resumed and sat looking at the hearth with so sombre an air that her lover did not know any longer, what to say or what to do.

In the meantime, the clock, which babbled on relentlessly, as though to banter them for their silence, struck two o'clock. Marthe raised her head. Leo seized the occasion and remarked:

"I think it's time for us to be going to bed."

And as she went into the other room, he sank into the chair she had left and plunged into his thoughts.

To tell the truth, they were not gay ones. The lad had broken early from the maternal yoke and had so abused the liberty he had acquired that debauchery, that avenger of manners, had branded him, body and soul. Feeling that he had a true talent, which artists

ought to appreciate and the bourgeois ought to honor, he had hurled himself, head lowered like a bull, into the morass of letters. There was, unfortunately, not even a good foot of water at the spot where he took his dive, and he bruised himself so violently on the stones at the bottom that he came up discouraged, before even having attempted to reach the open sea. He lived by his pen; that is to say, he lived by starving. Torturing his ideas and endeavoring to set down the extravagances that haunted him, he had found himself with snapping nerves, and an immense fatigue had crushed him. From time to time, in his good moments, he would write a page swarming with terrible grotesques, with succubi and larvae in the manner of Goya, but the next day, he would be incapable of getting out four lines, and he would end by painting, after extraordinary efforts, portraits which were beyond the bounds of all criticism.

The thing he dreamed of, as a means of exciting his mind, as the gong which should awaken his drowsy talent, was that monstrous fantasy of poet and artist: a woman who should love him, a woman clad in filmy toilets, set down in curious rays of light, in singular attitudes and colors, an altogether unlikely woman, painted by Rembrandt, his God! a woman insolently sumptuous, whose eyes should sparkle with that indefinable expression, that almost melancholy ardor for life, to be seen in Van Rijn's masterpiece, "the woman in the square salon at the Louvre." He would have her, also, with a skin the color of amber,

DOWN STREAM

and even with a dab of rouge on her cheek-bones and a trace of blue-ash under her eyes. He desired, above all, that she should be possessed of a wise and subtle mind; he wanted her extravagant and disturbing at appointed moments, ordinarily wise and devoted. This impossible dream, this unrealizable appetency, this prurient longing for wisdom and the unforeseen at the proper time, tortured him. Marthe had seemed to him, with her wastes of hair, her fairy eyes and famished mouth, to fulfill the ideal which he had vainly pursued. He had admired her upon the stage, provoking and naïve by turns. He was counting also upon the comedienne, as well as upon the mistress, in the playing of the rôle which he had assigned her in their relations.

He thought of all this. And then, he remembered suddenly that his place was not in an arm-chair, and he entered the sleeping room.

Marthe had gone to sleep in surprise. She, who had been the resigned handmaiden of every one, had never seen a man like this before. This astonishing young saltpeter, with his enthusiastic words, his mad lyricism, his attitudes of lost respect revived her own youth. She told herself that those who were in love were, undoubtedly, built that way, and she was grateful to him for not having evoked, in her bed, the memory of ancient defeats. She who had guided so many travelers, full-sail, toward the Cytherean isles, she forgot for once to make comparisons. Leo was, truly, her first lover. The next day at dawn, the young

man looked at her and was undecided. She was sleeping, her mouth in an *o*, her legs in an *i*, torso to the wind and throat to the devil! He asked himself if he shouldn't get rid of her, as he had the others. He withdrew his hand, which had slipped under Marthe's head. She opened her eyes and smiled up at him so prettily, that he kissed her at once and inquired if she had slept well. Her only response was to enlace him in her arms and to kiss his lips with little pecks. He forthwith lost his head.

He believed her worthy of all tenderness and all devotion, but there was one thing which non-plussed him a little, and that was when she came to get up. She dressed herself like all the others, seated on the edge of the bed, drawing on her long mauve stockings, buttoning her boots with a hair-pin and pulling on her chemise over her legs. Like all the others, too, she drew back the sash curtain and looked down into the court. What woman had not had this gesture? What woman had not asked the silly question: "Have you any soap? Oh, look at the rice-powder! Oh! how good it smells! it's *a la maréchale*, isn't it?"

He reproached himself with having believed that she was any different from her companions; and yet, when she had hidden under her dress all the treasures she had exposed the night before, he experienced something like regret. It pained him to have her go; and so, he pressed her to stay to breakfast. She was expecting her laundress; she should have gone home early. This response exasperated him. All women,

DOWN STREAM

when they wanted to go, were expecting their laundresses; he knew that only too well! She yielded, however, and while she was removing her hat and cloak, the poet hailed the concierge in the court.

Romel, for that was his name, raised his head and gravely yelled: "I'm coming." He came up an hour afterward.

"Go get me," Leo told him, "some beef-steak, a pastry, some cheese, a cake and two bottles of Moulin-a-Vent.

"I get you."

And leaning confidently over Leo's ear, Romel whispered: "By the way, listen, I just bought an astonishing Louis XVI. glass today; I wouldn't ask you much for it."

However unlikely the statement may appear, Romel, concierge and cobbler by profession, had been a painter of marines in his youth. To hear him tell it, he had had "temperament." At present, he made it his business to hawk a lot of filthy objects, doing his best to dispose of them to his tenants, especially in the morning, when they were not alone. And he would judge the charms and daintiness of a companion of the night before by the tone in which he was refused—for all did, concertedly, refuse him. This morning, Leo gave him a gentle no. Romel concluded, in consequence, that the young woman would frequently come to ask him for the key to the premises, and he made up his mind to greet her with a very low bow when she appeared.

While the concierge was on his way to the wine-merchant's at the corner, to order their breakfast, Leo lighted a great fire of vine-twigs, and as Marthe, seated upon the *chauffeuse*, raised her head slightly, he planted prolonged kisses upon her throat, her lips, her eyes, while her eyelids shut and quivered under the warm breath of his mouth. He was thinking of the exploits of the son of Jupiter and Alcmene, of Hercules, slayer of monsters, when Romel entered, followed by a *garçon* who carried food and wine wrapped in a napkin. The *garçon* laid the table and departed. Leo and Marthe sat facing each other. She ate with appetite; he did not stir, but sat there listening to the gentle crunch of her jaws. The water was steaming in the kettle; she poured it over the coffee. Then they drew near, and in the intervals between the rustling of their lips, the water sang and sputtered through the filter. On the floor above, a pianist was strumming out an air from *Faust*. Outside, the voice of a beggar-woman, alternating with the chopping of the piano, rose in the winter silence, in honor of the glory of love and the ineffaceable victories of the little "Dardant." They were so numbed by the heat of the coals that neither of them had the energy to go to the window and toss down a sou. They grew drowsy from listening to the monotonous song, and she finally arose, stretched herself, kissed him and fled, after having made an appointment with him for that same evening at the theatre.

DOWN STREAM

He felt abandoned, as soon as she had gone through the door. His lodgings seemed to him gloomy and cold. He dressed himself and went out. He must kill the day somehow. He went to make a fresh assault upon an editor who owed him money, but was not able to get a sou. Then he wandered down the boulevard and entered a café. Three o'clock struck from the bull's-eye perched above a shelf of bottles. He assigned himself the task of remaining there for an hour. He read and reread the papers, yawned, lighted a cigar and remarked that the people about him were holding idiotic conversations and that two young loafers, one of whom had a hare-lip and the other a squint-eye, were laughing like damned fools over a game of billiards. Then he looked at the clock again and called the *garçon*, who came at once. He left, reproaching himself for not having waited five minutes longer until the hour had struck.

He lounged on, looked at the display baskets, went through an alley, smiled at a little girl who was jumping the rope and walked, with quickened steps, to the Bastille, where, not admiring the genius who had erected such an architectural caper, he went around by the rear and once more entered a cafe. He ordered bitters, reread the papers, which he already knew by heart, and departed. He was happy to meet, at the top of the rue Vivienne, a friend whom he ordinarily avoided. He offered him an absinthe, and, when the clock-hand indicated six o'clock, left him precipitately.

The moment was approaching when he was to see Marthe again. He dined poorly, without appetite and without thirst, then ran down the rue de Fleurus and hastened to the greenroom, where all the actors were assembled.

It was the day of the première. Ginginet this evening was surlier and grumbled more than was his custom. His legs were killing him, he remarked, as he patted them down. Moreover, he was bursting with spite. He had just lost three rubbers at bezique, and the fourth was very nearly hopeless, for Bourdeau, his opponent, had just bid 250, and as he had in his hand the two aces of trumps, he at once annihilated, thereby, all hope of revenge on the part of his adversary.

Ginginet muttered, with his nose in his cards.

"Forty urchins," he cried, ill-temperedly, throwing down four knaves upon the table. He rose for an instant, to go look at the house through the peephole of the curtain.

He came back exasperated.

"All the porters and lamp-lighters," he exclaimed, "street-walkers in silks and hair-dressers! There's only one shining mark in the house, and what's more, he's pock-marked, an old freckle-face! Ah! my word! but it disgusts me to have to play to a house like that. By the way, suppose we count the trumps?"

"I can't bid more than 20," sighed Bourdeau.

"And I'm in for 500," growled Ginginet, "I'm cooked! Hey! Marthe, little cutie, tell me, what's be-

DOWN STREAM

come of that pen-pusher that's crazy about you? Are you still in love with him, you little scamp? Oh, come on! you needn't toss your head; you know well enough I'm only joking. Look here, what do you say if I stand for a cup of coffee and a glass of camphor? How does that sound?"

"On the stage! On the stage!" cried the stage-manager.

"Go to the devil!" yelled Ginginet, furiously.

But as the curtain rose, the old ham was forced to conceal his ill humor and make his entrance.

Leo, who had just arrived, kissed Marthe and made himself inconspicuous behind a wing.

The piece fell flat. Apple-cores flew, and owl-hoots drowned the noise made by the orchestra, which consisted of three old men without any hair who tickled the paunches of violoncellos. Marthe and Leo took flight. There was a general scramble for safety. The curtain dropped. There remained on the stage only Ginginet and the two authors of the piece.

The comedian consoled them as best he could.

"Young fellows," he said, "the trade of dramatic author will give you no bread, but it will at least bring you in some apples. You can use them for darning socks. If you want my advice on your work, here it is: Those who hissed were right, and those who bombarded me with projectiles are bastards. And now, flourish of trumpets, I'm going to decamp!"



V



MARTHE formed the habit of coming every night to sleep at Leo's. She even ended by bringing over the half of her wardrobe, not caring, when it rained, to get up early and go home to change her costume.

For one whole month, they were under the illusion that they were in love; and then, one fine day, a double catastrophe swooped down upon them. The theatre went into bankruptcy, and the journal for which Leo wrote suspended payments.

The poet lost, in this debacle, a hundred francs in income, and Marthe found herself upon the street, without a situation.

She wept and declared that she did not want to be a burden on him, that she would seek another place, that Ginginet was her friend and that in whatever theatre he found employment, she would surely be engaged along with him.

Leo, who detested the comedian, and who felt a furious desire to slap his face, when the latter "thou'd" Marthe or mauled her with his barroom courtesies, announced definitely that he would never consent to her seeing him again.

DOWN STREAM

"What am I to do, then?" she sighed.

He made a gesture of ignorance. At bottom, both had the same thought, each merely waiting for the other to make a proposal before accepting it at once.

He could not afford to pay the expenses for both of them. He must think of some means by which he would only have to pay for one. The outlay would thus be cut in half. They would economize on restaurants and the cleaning-woman. She would take upon herself the task of cooking, keeping the apartment clean and mending and laundering his linen; she would even, if need be, sew her own dresses and make her hats herself. Leo ended by being convinced that two could live cheaper than one.

This plan having been decided upon, the poet could not rest until it had been put into execution. He urged her to pack her things, lent her the money to pay her bill at the hotel where she lived, drove in nails and pulled them out and rearranged everything about his lodgings so that she might be able to move in. Their first married night was an incomparable one. Marthe had re-established order about the house, cleaned the drawers, put to one side the linen for darning and dusted off the books and pictures. When he returned for dinner, he found a good fire, a lamp that did not smoke as it ordinarily did and, in his easy chair, a woman prettily flustered, awaiting his coming with her feet at the fire and her back to the table.

"How I'm going to work," she said, "now that I've got such a nice home!"

Meanwhile, the money, uncontrollably, fled. Every day, it was a new expense: glasses, a decanter, plates. He was terrified, but consoled himself with the reflection that a job at two hundred francs a month was being saved for him on a new journal. The whole thing was to be patient; in a few months, his situation would improve.

The journal died before being born. Want came, and with it, the terrible disillusionments of concubinage.

At first, each one forces himself to be amiable; there is a rivalry to see which will anticipate the desires of the other and satisfy all the other's wishes. All goes well until the first quarrel; one misunderstanding leads to another, and misery engenders sobriety. Thanks to her, the wine of love is soon settled. Leo began to see things clearly. He was, moreover, harassed by those thousands of little nothings which are so desolating in the long run. Why was she so obstinate about not wanting to leave his easy chair in front of his desk? Why that mania for reading his books and marking them with dog-ears? And then, why that stubborn determination to hang her petticoats and dressing-gowns above his overcoat and trousers, when she might have hung them on another nail and not have forced him to take down a wagon-load of linen in order to get at his oilskin? He must endure, also, the odor of cooking, the heavy scent of wine in the sauces, the sickening smell of onions broiling on the stove, not to speak of bread-crumbs

scattered over the rug and bits of thread on all the furniture. His drawingroom had been overturned from top to bottom. On washdays, it was still worse! Of course, the ironing-board had to be placed with one end resting on his desk and the other on another table, while the clothes had to be hung out on beams in the entrance-way. Those pails of water on the floor, that stale aroma of lye, that reek of linen, which dampened his bronzes and tarnished his mirrors, drove him to despair.

The repeated disagreements every day, the absence of friends whom the presence of a woman kept away, the impossibility of working in the presence of a mistress who, having nothing better to do, insisted upon talking to you and upon relating all the tattle of the house—the insolence of the concierge, who had lost the job of caring for the house, and who took revenge through a thousand petty bickerings, the woman sensing this hostility against herself and insisting that the man mix in it and put a stop to it—her spiteful mouth when he left of an evening on business, or when, hard-pressed with work, he read or took notes in bed, her lamentations on the state of her dress, which was past all mending, and the sigh which, at sight of a chemise with a hole in it, says, clearly enough, that a few days from now there will have to be some new ones, that obstinate wail when money was lacking and the bad dinner she gave him because she had to save to buy some new gloves—all these occurrences exasperated him.

And then, what advantages had he gained in return for his lost liberty? What had become of the flowing gowns, the furbelowed petticoats, the black-silk corsets, all that artificial finery which he had adored? The comedienne, the mistress had disappeared, and in her place there remained, merely, a maid of all work. He did not even have that joy he had experienced in the early days of their liaison, when he would say to himself, on the way home, "She's coming this evening." The hastened steps to reach home the sooner, the very anguish that assailed you when the hour passed, and you did not hear a well known step mounting the stair and pausing in front of your door—Oh! how far away all that was now! No more fine talks with friends in a corner by the fire. No more intelligent discussions over this or that book, this or that picture. Try to talk literature and the fine arts to a woman who is yawning into her hand, who glances furtively at the clock, and who seems to be saying: "Stuff and nonsense, let's go to bed!" That suicide of the intelligence which is called "an affair" had begun to weigh upon him.

She, for her part, was none the less dissatisfied. She found him cold, more concerned with his art than with her; she revolted against his silences and his sulking spells. They accused each other, mutually, of ingratitude. Leo imagined that he had made a great sacrifice by taking Marthe into his life, while she was convinced that she was devoting her life to him. She did everything, repaired the furniture, washed the

DOWN STREAM

floor and the dishes, laundered his linen and saw no more of her old companions, whom he had, politely, shown the door. And in exchange for all this, she had nothing but poverty! Why, she could not even buy a new dress!

Moreover, she soon grew tired of the daily labor; the house was now swept in a devil of a fashion, and the meal was scrambled together in great haste. She had bits of rabbit and sliced leg-of-mutton, cooked in the oven, sent up from a pot-house. Leo complained.

"And what about the money?" she asked.

And when he replied that it was less expensive to cook meat at home than to have it sent in ready cooked, she groaned and said that she was exhausted and all she wanted to do was sleep. She did not even clear away the table, but undressed herself, with gestures of prostration, and stretched out on the bed, saying, every quarter of an hour, to her lover, who was trying to work, "Aren't you coming yet?"

He responded with a groan; then, against his will, he left his work and went to bed. She would not budge, pretending to be asleep, then rolled over, with an effort, to the edge of the bed, making room for him against the wall. She stubbornly turned her back on him, drawing up her legs as soon as he tried to put his own against hers for warmth. Out of patience, he extinguished the lamp and endeavored to sleep.

These childish teasings, these feminine sulks provoked him, and since they were renewed each time

MARTHE

she had to go to bed alone, he ended by yielding, since in order to have an amiable mistress it was necessary to try to go to sleep at stupid hours. Marthe, on the other hand, was not grateful to him, deciding that he lacked will-power and that she would make good use of his weakness upon the first occasion that offered.

With all this, he was jealous, and after a quarrel that arose from splashes of mud on her dress, which, despite her denials, plainly advertised the fact that she had gone against his wishes and had not stayed home all day, their life in common became unbearable.

She went out now, while he was correcting proofs in a magazine office or leafing through books in a library, and then denied having set foot out of doors. And yet, he could not tie himself down to watching her. But sometimes, he would check up the expense-book, with the object of seeing if the bit of velvet ribbon or the hat she had bought had been duly entered. He would add the columns over again, fearing these purchases did not show there and asking himself, if the sums he had given her had been wholly employed for the needs of the household, where she had got the money for her new acquisitions?

Suddenly, her absences ceased. She refused, with a tenacity he could not overcome, to go out with him into the street. He attributed this brusque change to one of those feminine caprices against which a man would be mad to contend. To understand the stubbornness of this girl, he would have had to know her

DOWN STREAM

past, and he knew nothing of that past, except the odds and ends with which, in moments of coolly reasoned expansiveness, she had supplied him. The truth was, Marthe had been seeing some of her old girl friends again. Having put to herself, one day, the daisy's famous query: "Shall I love him a little, much, passionately?" she had replied: "Much!" But still, one might have an affection for a man and not remain faithful to him; that was something you saw every day. And so, she had attempted to strike up an acquaintance with the czars of the corn-exchange—they were the rich ones, if there ever were any! She had almost entered into a liaison with one of them, when she encountered a police-sergeant, who looked her over, very curiously.

Her situation was a doubtful one. The Prefect's office might lay hands upon her at any moment. She had been an inmate of a bagnio, and she had escaped. The bloodhounds of public manners might track her down at any time.

She had come to the point where she trembled when the wind whistled under the door, or when the water-porter mounted the stairs with a heavy step. She did not go out any more except for provisions, and she came back at once. This life of starts and anguish did not leave her a moment's respite. She drank in order to forget her fears. She drank rum by the glassful, crouched upon a beast-skin-rug in front of a red-glowing fire; and she would smile at the flames, stupefied, mute, shuddering, passing her hands

MARTHE

over her forehead with a gesture of exhaustion. The terrific heat of the coals stunned her, her head whirled, her will weakened with her body, she was like one who was tied down and, unable to move arms or legs, she would fall into a drunken swoon before the fire, which snorted and scorched her face. Sometimes, in place of this torpor which she sought, fever would lay hold of her, and with it, hallucination, followed by long periods of self-annihilation, from which she would awaken bruised and like a dead woman. As a result, her reason soon went wandering, and her head, after balancing on her neck with maggot-like nutations, would fall heavily upon her upraised knees, and she would remain thus, besotted and inert, until the arrival of Leo, who would open all the windows and drag her over to the air.

The latter's patience deserted him. One day, when she had knocked against the furniture, battered and almost blinded by an atrocious neuralgia, he hurled all the bottles out the window. She watched him with the resigned eye of a dog that is beaten, then rose up in tears, embraced him, begged his pardon and promised him that she would not be sick any more but would do her best to make life happy for him.

Leo returned one night bearing a letter which the concierge, tired of waiting for him, had slipped under the door. He went over to the lamp, opened the envelope and turned dreadfully pale, while two big tears gushed from his eyes.

Marthe burst into sobs. When she learned that her

DOWN STREAM

lover's mother was very ill, she at once had an attack of nerves and lay, trembling and distracted, upon the bed. He was grateful to her for this excess of sensibility. It was, in truth, a trick of her too tautened nerves, rather than a real emotion; and yet, at the word, "mother," she had felt something like a stab in the chest. Her childhood, of which she was in the habit of forcing herself not to think, suddenly appeared before her. Her own mother to her was no longer dead. She saw her once more, leaning over her daughter's cradle, kissing the baby hands when they emerged from the coverlet and smiling upon the child with tears when the room was cold. An old air which her mother used to sing came back to her by snatches; she attempted to retrieve it, but her memory snapped under the strain, and she slept, a leaden sleep, until the next morning.

When she awoke, her lover was already up and preparing to depart. She kissed him effusively, promised to write to him and wanted to accompany him to the railway station, but he was already late; by the time she dressed, he would surely miss his train. She had to give up the idea.

When Leo was gone, she hastily threw on her clothes. She felt a need to walk, to get some air. She now regarded as foolish her fear of the police and, going from one extreme to another, she felt she would even like to go hunt them up, beard them and tell them to their faces: "You're nothing but a pack of dirty jackasses." But this super-excitation fell

MARTHE

from her as soon as she had stepped out.

She went off to hunt up an old comrade who kept one of the lowest dives in the rue de Vaugirard. The place was almost empty and had not yet been swept. The mirrors rendered turbid by the pomaded heads that had rested against them, were clear above and tarnished below. The floor, powdered with rouge, was starred with phlegm and dried spittle, with cigar-butts and pipe-leavings. The marble tops of the tables were lined with the round imprints of sticky glasses, while at the end of the room, upon a divan, there lay a living infamy, the landlady's father, whose duty it was to work the handle of the beer-pump.

The room exhaled the stale odor of tobacco, that odor which is peculiar to tap-rooms. The old man snored as he slept, and Maria, Marthe's friend, seated upon a bench, was engaged in catching flies with her mouth. After they had kissed, Maria, leading Marthe back into the kitchen, said to her suddenly:

"Did you get my letter?"

"No."

"But the police are on your heels, my dear. It was the little red-head who told me. Last night, you were recognized by a policeman who had lost trace of you but who has found out where you are."

She was dumfounded. Her fears, then, were realized! The *Dispensaire* would come to demand an explanation of her flight! They would go to Leo. The concierge would learn everything and would tell

DOWN STREAM

Leo, when he came back, what she was, what sort of life she had led. She resolved not to go back to his place.

"I would offer to hide you for a few days here with me," said her friend, "but I don't live alone, and my husband would be angry. Better go to Titine's."

"Where does she live?"

"Ah! I can't just tell you. She lives, they tell me, somewhere near the exchange, but I don't know the name of the street or the number. But stay here till nightfall, and we shall see. From now till then, you'll have time to think and decide what you want to do."

Night came, and Marthe did not know what to do. Fearing the bloodhounds of the police, who would be sure to make a shakeup of the women in all the dives of the quarter, she fled the shop and, not knowing where to go for refuge, she went down the quays as far as the Pont-Neuf, telling herself, without believing it, that chance would be propitious, and that she would meet her girl-friend on the way.

Arrived at the bridge, she felt so tired, so desolate, that she sank upon a bench, on one of those half-moons which surmount each pier. She viewed, with tears in her eyes, the splashing of the eddies about the arches.

The Seine, that evening, carried water the color of lead, rayed here and there by a reflection from the street lamps. To the right, upon a coal-boat, moored to an iron ring the size of a hoop, shadows of men and women moved about confusedly. To the left

MARTHE

arose the platform of the bridge, with its statue of the king. Some distance down, near a *concert*, a tree pinked its frail outlines against the slate-colored gray of the sky. Still further on, the pont des Arts shaded off into the mist, with its coronal of gas-jets, while the shadow of its pillars died in the river, in a long black spot. A fenboat shot through the arcade of the bridge, casting a puff of warm steam in Marthe's face and leaving behind it a long wake of white spray, which was gradually extinguished in the soot of the water. A fine rain was beginning to fall.

Marthe was no longer able to think of anything.

She looked down into the Seine without even seeing it. The rain was falling harder, in larger drops, which lashed her face. She awoke as from a dream. The spectre of the police arose in front of her, implacably. She leaned over the parapet, and for a second was tempted to put an end to all her woes. Then she grew afraid, recoiled and, thoroughly frightened, wanted to flee, when a man, unspeakably drunk, seized her by the arm.

"Well, Marthe! Ah, ha! What are you doing looking down into the Seine in a beating rain with your cloak all drenched?"

And Ginginet, noticing how pale she looked, asked her if she was in trouble.

She confessed to him that she had been about to leap into the river.

"Nonsense, little girl," tragically bawled the old sot. "Are you dying of hunger? Have you killed

DOWN STREAM

some one? Have you put a crimp in the neck of some comrade? Have you been dragged through the gutter for insulting the army? What have you been doing that you have no place to go and want to commit suicide? None of that, Lisette," continued the pitiless joker, holding his cane up like a rifle, "even if you were the little corporal himself, you shouldn't pass!"

She did not say a word.

"But, little ninny," the actor went on, "what good would it do to drown yourself? Death is as stupid as anything—even in the fifth act of a drama. Look here, reflect a little. Can't you just see yourself on the slab of a morgue, with your red hair and a deep-green belly? Don't make me play the role of guardian angel. I haven't studied that part yet! Better, rather, come have a little drink with me. Even if you are a lady who keeps the company of poets, you'd better come and down a glass of cognac. That's a bargain, is it not? No? Are you a block of wood that you can't answer me? I'll bet it's the fault of that blackguard you've taken for a lover. Mr. Leo must have caused you plenty of misery. Well!"

On hearing her lover's name, Marthe began sobbing.

"All right then," groaned the drunkard, "come on, here's the water. Ready! I'm looking out for myself."

"Oh, now!" she sobbed, becoming the more excited as she wept, "couldn't you do any better than that?"

MARTHE

Do you think, then, I want to die so badly? You know how it is. You are mad for a moment. You imagine it's a simple matter to climb up on the parapet and take the leap. But that does not last long! You have a terrible fear. Ah! but it shakes you when you see the water boiling underneath the bridge! It is as if some one had you by the throat and was strangling you! And yet, it's stupid all the same, for it would be better to end everything than to go on living as I'm going to do! Listen, Ginginet, you may say what you will, but Leo was a good lad all the same! I acted with him like the lowest of women. I got drunk, I tell you, and he put me to bed, and took care of me when I was sick. Would you have done that, would you? Go on, you know very well, you would have gotten drunk with what I had left! As to your opinion of me, I don't give a dam for that! Is there such a thing as love between folks like us two? We meet and we sleep together, just as we eat when we are hungry! Oh, I've had enough of this life of constant fright, of being tracked down like a wild beast! I give up. And then what! When you looked at me with your scarey eyes, did you think you had found a piece of virtue, that day you picked me up in a wine-shop? You picked up one who had been dragged through the mud, my dear! And you know, it's a hard job getting clean again. It always stays with you; it comes back like an oil stain on a piece of goods! But then, after all, what's the difference? No father, no mother

DOWN STREAM

and no health—that's what you call a chance in a trade like this!"

"Wait a minute," she went on, sinking a boot-heel into the mire, "there's mud for you! Well, that's nothing! I'm going to sink into it up to my chin, and I swear to you, old dear, I'll never raise my head again, but I'll sink—down—down—until, with my mouth full, I smother and burst!"

"She's mad!" exclaimed Ginginet, stupefied at seeing her flee along the side of the Exchange. "She's going to do something silly. Good heavens! I'm not joking any longer. I'm going to bring her back."

He almost caught up with her at a corner of the street. His legs weighed him down, formidably; the bad wine he had consumed had gone to his muscles. He had to stop, pant and stick in his shirt, which was emerging from between his trousers and his waistcoat. Then he began running along the sidewalks again, sometimes losing sight of her in a crush of carriages, sometimes catching sight of her at a distance, crying after her, at the risk of being arrested by the police.

He finally discovered that he was galloping along almost in his bare feet. His old shoes had given up the ghost in the course of this dizzy race. Flattened out like pancakes and puffing like a pair of bellows, they caught in a pile of manure, gave a false turn and their owner went sprawling, full length and flat on his belly.

He raised himself up, numbed by the impact, and,

MARTHE

with a persistence born of that tenacity peculiar to drunkards, rather than of any affection he felt for Marthe, he took up the chase again. He saw her open a door and disappear. Bruised to a pulp, snorting and sweating, he came up to this door, then threw his nose in the air, looked the house over and stood there with a gaping mouth, raising his arms to heaven and dropping his stick. Suffocated with drunkenness, stifled by the stupor that came over him, he could only stammer:

"Oh! Lord Jesus! Oh, well, it's for the best!"

And he fell headlong upon a pile of cabbage-stumps and endive parings, which spattered with green the pavement of the street.



VI

HE WAS surprised to wake up the next morning in the police station. He tried to recall what misdemeanors he might have committed. Not being able to do so, he concluded, judiciously, that he had been soused. Suddenly, he remembered having met Marthe and having followed her into a little lane, the name of which escaped him. He promised himself, however, that, since he knew Leo's address, he would go to the latter's house as soon as he had been released.

He was bailed out that very day by one of his friends and went as quickly as he could to seek Marthe. The concierge informed him of her disappearance and of the visit of the police. In the meanwhile, Leo appeared, descending from a cab, traveling bag in hand.

He received Ginginet uncivilly enough. The latter said to him, very haughtily:

"Monsieur, if you desire news of Marthe, you will do well to address yourself to the Prefecture of Police, 2nd. bureau of the 1st. division, *Service des Moeurs*. They can give you some. As for me, while

MARTHE

mourning the dramatic artist who was my old comrade, I admire the woman who was my old mistress. She now has at least one point over the others; she's through deceiving men. Marthe won't lie any more, now that she no longer has any occasion to simulate the pulings of true love. What the bourgeois call sticking one's head in the sewer or descending the last step of the ladder of infamy, I call an expiation, a return to decency!"

And saying this, with a haughtier air than ever, the old ham lifted his felt hat, which, as a result of the collisions and jostlings of the night before, was now piteously warped. It looked like an accordeon, about ready to play a funeral march, as his comical and calamity-stricken silhouette disappeared, suddenly, at the turn of the passage-way.



VII



WHEN HE had left for his dying mother's bedside, Leo had no longer thought of Marthe. His mother, whom he adored, and the danger which appeared to be imminent, and which he feared could not be warded off, had absorbed him completely during the train ride.

He had remained with his mother for a number of days. The danger was over, his anguish was gone, and the memory of Marthe obsessed him, incessantly. She had, certainly, captivated him more than had any other. So long as they had not lived together, so long as they had not known the shortcomings of life in common, he had felt violently smitten with her. At the end of eight days of intimacy, however, all that springtime of the woman, which is so enchanting, and which is but the result of absences wisely arranged, had vanished, while all the hideous weaknesses of character which each endeavors to overlook in, and to hide from, the other had become known. There was no longer any of that mystery, without which passion speedily tires. The instincts of lust had been satisfied and the condiment pro-

vided by charming toilets had been exhausted. After having tasted the meats of high mirth, he had penetrated to the arcana of the kitchen, and his appetite at once had left him; he no longer felt any desire to touch these subtly overspiced viands. He had begun to tire, too, of the hopeless monotony of revenge, of those wearisome duets, played upon all the pipes of domesticity. And then, when he came to think it over, she had rendered life unbearable for him, with her mad longings and her fits of anger, her vicious drunkenness and sickly despondencies, her sensual tumults, alternating with a frigidity that was not, by any means, all feigned. Had he left Paris for any other motive than the one which had caused him to leave, he would have looked upon his escape as a school-boy does a vacation which delivers him from the thralldom of his masters.

The leisurely life he led in this little house of his mother's forcefully took his thoughts back to Paris. He recalled the joyous dinners, the childish escapades of their first days together, the perfidious combat of their lips. All the defects of his idol vanished. He saw her, in a manner, idealized and more beautiful than she had ever appeared to him. The poet reappeared in the lover, and he placed back upon the pedestal of a goddess the doll beneath whose rose-skin covering he had glimpsed the sawdust. In short, he was dying of desire to worship her once more.

He was, with all this, undermined by worry. All his letters had gone unanswered, and he feared that

DOWN STREAM

some misfortune had befallen her. He was unable to keep still. Everything wearied him. His mother was well again. There was no longer anything to hold him in the country. And so, he left.

The railway journey, lasting over a long and tiring day, quickened his desire to see Marthe. In vain, he endeavored to kill the interminable day, forcing himself to take an interest in the movements of trains, in the engines which passed in a cloud of reddish smoke, the sunlight sparkling from their copper plates, and in the rails which gleamed like slender threads of water. It was hopeless; he could think of nothing but Marthe. He regarded the people piled into the compartment and amused himself, for a number of seconds, by observing their manners and their belongings. They were, for the most part, peasant men and women. An artist would have rejoiced at this collection of noses. There were pug-noses, retroussé noses, gibbous noses and flat and cloven bottle-noses. There was an exposition of teeth of all sorts, white, yellow, bluish, black, with stumps of every shape, some protruding over the lips, others beating a retreat under the gums. He even took a notebook and forced himself to sketch some of the peasant women, with their backs turned toward him, their necks upholstered in granulous fat, like those of fowls, and with tropic-colored skins. But he grew tired of this sport, put his pencil back in his pocket and, leaning his head against the window, gazed for a long time at the endless string of

MARTHE

houses and trees, which seemed to be joining hands and dancing a gigantic farandole in front of his eyes.

Then, he fell back into his sorrowful thoughts. The Gare du Nord finally etched itself in the mist, and he got off, leaped into a cab and arrived at the courtyard of his own house with a beating heart. After the interview with that odious Ginginet, he had fallen into an easy chair, annihilated by all he had just learned.

He looked about his room, which remained as it was the day he had left it. Feminine boots were stranded upon the flowers of the rug, toes up, heels down. The bed was unmade, the bedclothes lying the way they had happened to be tumbled, the *couvre-pied* was wadded up and stuffed into the crack between the bed and the wall, the pillows were squashed, with their corners turned up like horns. Everything spoke of the disorder of arising. Hairpins in a cup, slippers scattered in every corner, a camisole hanging over the back of a chair, the basin full of soapy water, the musty odor of the room, the perfume of *eau de Botot*, which had been used for cleansing teeth, the fine aroma of Cyprus, escaping from a poorly stoppered bottle—all this hurly-burly of objects, all these reminiscent scents reminded him of Marthe's flight, a contingency he had not been able to foresee. He rose, as though propelled by a spring; and at sight of the bed, which had been the bivouac of their love, of all her malevolent graces, he felt a smothering sensation and stood there motion-

DOWN STREAM

less, his eye stupidly fixed upon the litter of the bedclothes.

The days which followed were atrocious. He began leading the life of those who are shut up in Paris, without family and without comrades, and who, at the dinner hour, must put on their shoes and go out to seek pasturage in a soup-kitchen. This place, where people came in rowdy hoards to eat raw and tasteless food, this hubbub of gray-clad waitresses, navigating between the marble-topped tables, these wretched *topettes* of wine, these cheap plates, this gluttony on the part of imbeciles who would spend two francs for food and eight for first-class drinks, the terrifying melancholy evoked by an old woman in black, squatting alone in a corner and grinding away slowly on a fragment of boiled beef, all these sickening odors, all these deafening cries, all this elbowing of crowds—he had known them now for months. He would leave this feed-trough, tired and disgusted, not knowing what to do, irritated by the joy of others, oppressed by a persistent ennui. And then, he would perceive, at the corner of the street, a figure, a dress, which looked like Marthe's, and it was as though he had received a blow of the fist in the chest. He would return home with drooping shoulders, his knees swaying under him, and endeavor to write a few lines. Then he would toss his pen away with rage, take up a book and look at the clock, waiting for ten to strike before going to bed.

MARTHE

Ah! but the day was hard to get through! But of an evening, when the half-lights of dusk, the red skies of autumn tore him to the heart, all his rancors would re-awaken and assail him more stubbornly than ever. Whatever he did, he thought of Marthe. He saw her as, at once, exciting and cunning. He recalled the undulations of her body upon the divan. She would smile up at him, with gleaming eyes and teeth, and he would arise, his senses in a tumult, seize his hat and flee through the streets.

To all these griefs were added those terrible details of daily life which break down the strongest. All those little nothings, your linen in shreds with no one to mend it, your buttons off, the bottoms of your trousers frayed, giving you the appearance of a tramp, all those silly mishaps which only a woman can remedy with two turns of the needle, harassed him with their thousand little pin-pricks and made him feel, more than ever, how absolutely abandoned he was. For the first time in his life, he thought of marriage, but he was not in a position reasonably to consider such an eventuality.

He reproached himself for not having detained Ginginet, for not having asked him for Marthe's address. He sought him vainly, in the cafés which were the actor's accustomed haunts, until one evening, he was tapped on the shoulder by one of his friends, an interne in the hôpital de Lariboisière. He told his friend of his troubles and asked him, merely by chance, if he knew the address of the old ham.

DOWN STREAM

"Why, yes," said the other. "Ginginet has set up shop as a wine-merchant in the rue de Lourcine, only . . . only, since he's about to go bankrupt, you'll have to hurry, if you're going to look him up."

Leo seized the young fellow's arm and dragged him, post-haste, into the meandering passage-ways of the quartier des Gobelins.



VIII



IN FOLLOWING , to the left of the Observatoire, the boulevard de Port-Royal, they came, after a few minutes walking, to a flight of stairs which led down under a bridge and dropped into one of the most hideous streets of Paris, the rue de Lourcine. There was, on one hand, a waste-land, with pools of water, stone-piles and pickets, the last bound together with twine and floating, like flags, camisoles of a faded pea color, bluish blouses, trousers of bottle-green and tattered rags; on the other hand, opposite the stoneyard, there extended, in onion-rows, a group of cracked hovels, mitred with zinc roofs, caved in and crumbling. There were a number of small shops: jewelers in old shoes; goldsmiths in leather, making a business of mending old clogs, patching women's boots and retailing cork and straw soles; fruit-stores, dealing in milk and in lead-soldiers; groceries, in which were piled, separated by glass partitions, various lots of spoiled apples, with shriveled peels of the color of match-wood, along with waves of blonde almonds, piles of candied sugar and Guillot biscuits, stacks of Gruyère cheese and red and orange sweet-meats,

DOWN STREAM

some limpid and some sloshy, beside red litres and wooden drums, in which dissolved meats were liquefying; and finally pot-houses, in the windows of which crisp and crackling fish were drying up, with bleeding rabbits framed by a wall of opaque dishes and salad-plates overflowing with prunes, the latter engulfed in the mire of their own sauce.

Leo and his friend paused to get their bearings in this street. Neither one nor the other knew the comedian's exact address. They finally, not far from the rue des Lyonnais, turned for directions to the shop of a tobacconist, who was proudly displaying, in his show-window, above his pouches of pig-skin and granulous leather, clusters of white pipes, with the heads of young girls and of Turks, of Zouaves and of goats, of Bacchi and of patriarchs. A chubby-cheeked maiden, who was weighing out rolls of tobacco, pointed out the house they were seeking, a house which had recently been smeared with a grumous red, something like crushed strawberries in white cheese or wine-lees in plaster. And it was here, in truth, behind a zinc counter, perforated with minute cisterns for the dripping of wine, that the old ballad-singer ordinarily stood, bawling and gesticulating. His belly girdled with a black apron, his arms bare, his mouth indented with the stubs of teeth, his snout red as a kidney-potato, Ginginet, ham-actor and drunkard by preference, wine-shop-keeper and pimp by necessity, drank steadily from four o'clock in the morning till midnight, with his

customers, the majority of whom were laborers, employed as rag-pickers or as tanners.

But these working men did not come in, except of a morning, at day-break, or of an evening, at night-fall. And so, the wine-shop was almost always empty from nine o'clock in the morning till eight o'clock at night, and aside from a mob of boozers, who came in to fill up on meatball-hash and tripe *a la mode de Caen*, the big room was deserted. Of an evening, on the contrary, it was filled till one could no longer move in it, whereupon the block-head of a proprietor would slip away, leaving in charge of the counter a big long-legs in a velvet skull-cap, an old boy who kept his books and, at need, waited on the trade. And Ginginet would then go to join, in another room, separated from the big one by the kitchen, his friends and confrères, an aggregation of ballad-singers and hangers-on of the newspapers. These customers drank their bellies full, without a sou in their pockets. But it was not with impunity that one had yodeled upon the boards, his mouth in a pout and his eyes like billiard-balls; and when Ginginet found himself in the company of his old friends, he was more than willing to give them credit, almost regretting, as he did so, the absence of his former poverty, even deploring, when he had had a drop too much, the death of his uncle, which had left him heir to the wine-shop.

His companions, however, regretted less than he his change of fortune. They assisted him in consum-

DOWN STREAM

ing his stock, while he permitted them to do so with a fine disinterestedness, born, without doubt, of his habit of getting soused from dawn to night and from night to dawn. He barely recognized Leo this evening. He had fared so heartily in the kitchen and had so drowned his soul in a sea of liquor that he was now reeling like a vessel in distress, shipping not water but wine, fore and aft. He had dragged himself from the counter into the little room, and there, caressing his pounce, he stood uttering, with profound idiocy, a rosary of sonorous words, the sense of which he did not understand, ratiocinating for the thousandth time, repeating himself over and over again till his voice gave out, concerning his theories of the actor on a spree, addressing his remarks more particularly to an unfortunate journalist, who rested his nose on a table and cried out, in a whining voice:

"Ginginet, you are as grandiloquent as the late Cicero himself, but you give me a pain!"

Leo finally succeeded in getting the old drunkard over into a corner, where he asked him for news of Marthe. Ginginet sang out, at the top of his voice:

"She's my blessing she's my life!"

Then, blinking an eye and tapping the poet on the leg, he stuttered:

"What, my son, so that's what's eating your guts, eh? She's all to the mustard, that's clear enough. You'll have to admit she's got a head like the hair-dressers' statue, 'Mlle. Sidonie,' with her black eyes and sunny locks!"

MARTHE

"Hey! *promme de canne!*" bellowed a voice, "you can go on with your gab-fest later. But first, serve us some Bocks!"

It was impossible for Leo to pick up the conversation at the point where he had dropped it. He prepared to leave, promising himself he would come back in the daytime; but all the exits were stopped by piles of human bodies. A triumphant hubbub filled the room; a dozen individuals had rolled on the floor and were sleeping there with their legs sprawled out, while in the corners, foul-mouthed wenches with disheveled hair were exchanging ardent glances with the men and struggling in the arms of assailants who were, apparently, endeavoring to knead them. Leo and his friend finally reached the door, when it opened, and a bevy of half-drunken working girls tumbled in upon the floor, shaking out their petticoats, laughing loudly and stupidly and shouting, at the top of their lungs:

"Shindy! Shindy!"

Leo, suddenly, thought he was going to faint. He had just spotted Marthe in this battalion of mountebanks. She turned frightfully pale and waited for him to come up to her. He drew himself up in front of her, with flaming eye, trembling all over. He wanted to speak, but had the sensation of a hand at his throat; and so, stuttering, stammering, mad with rage, he made with his arms that gesture of disgust which is characteristic of Parisians, and, propelled by his friend and deafened by the hoots of those whom

DOWN STREAM

he had bowled over, he found himself outside before he quite knew how it had happened.

When he had left, Ginginet surprised a gesture of distress on the part of Marthe. He remained pensive for a moment, then called her over and took her up into his room, a hole-in-the-wall, formed of lattice-work and plaster, and, crossing his arms, said to her:

"Well?"

Since she did not respond, he answered his own question, becoming more worked up as he went on:

"Look here. You're breaking my heart. I took you out of the gutter, where you were lying, flat on your back, I had you scratched off the Prefect's books, and I brought you here, where you eat, you drink, and you smoke, which is all there is in life, that! Yours is a lot that any woman might envy, and in return for this paradise, in return for all these eats and all these drinks, you treat me like a ninny; you pluck me like a jonquil. It's a shame, I claim! I've nothing to show for my money; it's a bad bargain I've made; I have nothing but bones to gnaw, when all I want is a little pleasure! No, no, it's too much! You come, you go, you come back or you don't come back, and I say nothing—I can't do anything else. You have other lovers, that's one sure thing, big lubbers of twenty, who keep on telling you that they're in love with you, and you believe 'em. You think you're eating turbot, because you read it on the bill of fare, as if there was any turbot left! It's a flounder that

MARTHE

you bring up. A turbot is like all things that are really good; it doesn't exist! It is most certainly true that faith is the only thing that saves. . . faith and stupidity. . . Oh! you know well enough, it's not worth your while to turn up the footlights in your eyes. I can see clearly enough, I assure you! I know you, you and your kind. To have a couple of dozen lovers, one an hour, that is of no consequence; one makes a trade of it, or one doesn't; I have nothing to say to that; that seems to me altogether natural. But I don't want you to hold out on me as you do on the others—not me! You understand me, don't you? And so, I demand that you stop making goo-goo eyes at that poet of yours. If he hooked you again, he would be getting not a wife, but a mistress. The wife,—we'll forget that—but the mistress, no! There it is, my girl; take it or leave it!”

“I leave it,” said Marthe.

“You leave it? Suit yourself. Go on to your hard-up lover. No, listen, stay here a few minutes and think it over. With him, it's poverty and nothing else; with me, it's a glass never empty, it's a perpetual smoke-house and a perpetual feast for those jaws of yours.”

And as, without listening to him, Marthe went on wrapping up a bundle of her togs, Ginginet seized her hands and continued:

“Wait a minute! After all, maybe I was wrong, since it's not your fault he came here this evening. Look here, we're not going to argue any more. I've got dust in my throat already from talking so much. I

DOWN STREAM

have no ill will, nor you, have you? What do you say, dearie, if we swill down a little bishop? What do you think? I'll yell down to Ernest to send us up a big one. . . . No? You're not thirsty? Oh! don't be afraid, this is going to be a real bishop, not one of those they serve down there. I'll have him send up a bottle of Grave along with it. That'll be nice, won't it? Then, good God, what *will* it take to cheer you up? See, you can leave your pack here; you're not going to take it away this evening. Where will you go, then? Not to Leo's again? Oh! thunder! if you go there. . . ."

"Well, and if I do go there? Do you think I've been listening to that song and dance of yours for the last hour? You got me out of jail, that's true. Why? To set me down in a barroom and put your customers in a good humor. I'm a good advertisement for your small-beer. I play the role of match, but I haven't the right to light out for good! As for my hard-up lover, as you call him, I might love him, maybe, if he had a little spunk, if he wasn't such a softy—if he was a man, in short. But that's all right. In spite of all, I was almost crazy about him again this evening. He didn't have any use for me, and that got me. Oh! I won't try to hide it, I was on the point of running after him."

"Knowing that he didn't have any use for you?"

"That he didn't have any use for me. Ah! but you're stupid, aren't you? That is because men never forgive the women who make them suffer. If they did, there wouldn't be any more unhappiness in the

world, and there would be no need of prisons and judges!—But it's a fine revenge to get you in our clutches! Oh, it's quite simple, too!"

And, almost touching his own, she held out her marvelous lips, brilliant as peonies, glowing with the white flame of her teeth.

Ginginet was deeply stirred and held out his arms.

"Put down your paws, old man!" she exclaimed. "I'm playing a comedy, and it's you who've taught it to me. And now, I've got you all mixed up. All things considered, that see-saw paunch of yours offends me; your cheeks are peeling, your nose is like a truffle, and your face, I assure you, doesn't make a hit with me any more than the rest. Good night!"

"I'll tell you one thing, Marthe," said Ginginet, turning very pale, "and that is, that I've a good notion to slap your face, as you deserve!"

"Well, do tell! You slap my face! Don't you dare come near me, or I'll break this decanter over your head!"

Ginginet did not wait for more, but rushed at her, only to stop in mid-air, a piece of glass, which dented his cranium; but he seized the girl by her hands and threw her rudely to the floor.

She arose, rubbing her bruises, and looked at him, more in astonishment than in anger.

"You've had your say now!" remarked the comedian, "go to bed right away!"

And he left, double-locking the door behind him. He went down the stairs, then, smiting his forehead,

DOWN STREAM

climbed them again, opened the door and said to Marthe:

"By the way, you know, if you want to go to Leo's don't let me stop you, my dear!"

She did not breathe a word, and Ginginet murmured:

"I've got her. Now that she's free to go to him, she won't budge." And he added, sententiously, caressing the peak of his nose: "It's astonishing how silly poets are. They make phrases, they weep, they whine, they cry out, as if that had any effect on women! They only love the one with a punch. It's not maraschino you want to feed 'em, but vinegar. I'll have love on a platter for eight days now!"



IX



GININET had been right. Marthe had arrived at that stage when the senses no longer function except through blows. Love that was afraid, love that only lived on brutalities and insults, a nervous system stretched to the breaking point and not able to stretch any further, except under the impact of physical pain, the joys of the gutter, that watchful hatred of the male who lashes you, furious revolts against such servitude, the joy at striking one's tyrant as revenge for being crushed under heel by him—all these things nearly drove Marthe mad. She had moments of languorous prostration, when she would receive blows without flinching, until, crying out with pain, she would beg him not to kill her. She also had her moments of rebound, days when, rearing and prancing, she would hurl herself upon him, experiencing a bitter pleasure in this clash of body with body, and in rolling on the floor and breaking all that fell under her hand. Then, breathless and without energy, enamored still but sullen, she would throw her bruised arms around the sinister old farceur's neck, who would go down to lap up a pint, replying to the drinkers who had

DOWN STREAM

been astounded by the outcries:

"Oh, that's nothing. I was just ironing out my wife's chemise."

He came down one day, his face spattered with blood. The house burst into a laugh. This raillery exasperated him, and he climbed up to his room once more and nearly murdered Marthe with kicks of his boot. They had to tear her away from him, put her in a cab and take her to the nearest hotel.

Suddenly, she found herself cured of her infatuation. When she awoke the next morning, nearly broken in two and with a face black and blue from blows, she was astonished that she had been able for so long to put up with these ignoble brawls, and she felt a horrible disgust for the man who had beaten her in this fashion. She had still a few sous in her pocket, and so, she stayed on at the hotel until the trace of the blows had been effaced; then she dressed in her best and resolved to go seek shelter with one of her old comrades, a former actress in Bobino's theatre, whose address she had come upon again.

This woman, since her thirty-fifth year, had been kept by an elderly married man, who was in the habit of finding consolation for his wife's beauty in the adulterated charms of his mistress.

When Marthe reached her house, Titine, wallowing upon a divan, was having her hand read by her maid, who was explaining, in the gibberish-dialect of Auvergne, the disastrous influence of the line of Saturn, expressing astonishment that a lady of so

few morals should have no more cross-markings upon her Mount of Venus. Marthe interrupted this chiromantic seance by explaining, in a few words, the favor she had come to seek of her former companion.

"You fell into it just right, my dear," replied the prostitute. "I'm having a little party here this very evening. It will be amusing, you shall see. There will be many rich young fellows, and if you like, I can put you in touch with one of them. Look here, my little one, this is no kind of life, to be running about with Peter and with Paul! It's enough to have one man who keeps you and another who crunches you. You must put an end to this. Look at me. I'm happy enough. I have an old gawk for a lover, it's true, but he almost never stays all night, and that's something. Get yourself, as I've done, an old one who's married or a very young one, who won't be until after he's let himself be ruined. Either one or the other's all right. The only thing is, not to take a lover who's past thirty. No more love and no more passion, it's the very death for us with the ones like that!"

The evening turned out to be a charming one. The big merchant arrived, flanked by a pastry with truffles and a basket of wines. He was a good-natured shrimp and a jolly good sport, this commercial traveler of the brothels. Ventripotent and broken-winded, he wore fin-like whiskers, and his face presented this amazing peculiarity, that the nose was the color of

DOWN STREAM

egg-plant, whereas the rest of his physiognomy was of that brilliant red tint of the enamellers, known as Cassian purple. He paid his compliments to Marthe, with boxes of sweetmeats, explaining to her that he had been married for two or three years to a certain young woman, but that they had been separated, in bed if not in body, ever since he had become acquainted with Titine, and he ended his confidences with the confession that he adored youth, and that his greatest happiness was to sup occasionally with joyous lads and pretty girls.

The bell began to ring. The guests were arriving in a throng. Ceremonious old men, with a frolicsome smile on their toothless lips, young fellows clad in turned-down collars, short lounge-jackets, wide trousers and beribboned shoes, women a trifle mature but freshened up with rose and talcum, young girls with hoarse masculine voices and flat or flaccid bosoms, and youngsters just out of college, with stripes across their fronts and arms—all these piled into the little drawingroom. The uncomfortable feeling of the first few moments was soon dissipated. The men grew bolder, the big merchant laughing his big heavy laugh. Titine assumed the prim airs of mistress of the house, while the *bonne* displayed all the familiarities that a servant-maid does with prostitutes. The punch began to circulate, and absurd remarks began to be uttered. The women did not, as yet, dare to reveal themselves or to give free rein to their roadhouse inclinations, while the old-

MARTHE

stagers were saving themselves for the guzzling hour and the young ones talked of the last ball of Madame So-and-So. Some one proposed that they shake out their legs, and the quadrill began, almost decently at first; but as the couples warmed to it, and the big boy, incapable of restraining himself, began to indulge in lubricious remarks, the dance went astray. When the supper hour arrived, the old ones began unbuttoning their waistcoats and bestirring themselves, flapping their coat-tails, crooking their arms, vociferating, sweating, puffing, thumping their legs and shaking their torsos.

The Auvergnese maid opened the door to the diningroom, and each one rushed to the table, the company seating themselves pell-mell, the women on the laps of the men, all beginning, at once, to nibble at the peas and truffles. The old grandfather, with a galloping paunch and lecherous eyes, was exultant. He poured champagne for the ladies, red-foaming champagne, and applied his repulsive old lips to the arms of his fair neighbors. This was the signal. The couples began to cling. Marthe was seated beside a young man who talked to her of the races, and of a bet he had laid on Finette, a superb filly, he assured her.

When he had exhausted this subject of conversation, he made a few heavy remarks, to which she replied only with smiles, resolving to ask her friend what sort of silly fool this was, anyway.

"He's a famous imbecile," Titine told her, "silly

DOWN STREAM

and rich. Sharpen your teeth, my girl, and sink them in deep. Be amiable, but keep him in leash. You have to do it with snots of that age!"

They rose from the table, and coffee and liqueurs were brought into the drawingroom. There was a true stampede. Sunk in the easy chairs, the old boys no longer budged; somnolent and gorged, they were engaged in digesting. The young ones fluttered about and lighted cigarettes. Others, very pale, disappeared, while still others took seats beside the women and commenced to tease them. Marthe became cold as marble when the ephebe, emboldened by the uncere-moniousness of the other couples, tried to kiss her. He was somewhat surprised, but consoled himself with the satisfaction of having fished up from the mire of this pond a woman who was not to be swept off her feet the very first evening.

"You will sleep here, won't you?" inquired Titine.

"But how can I do that?" replied Marthe. "Isn't your lover going to stay?"

"Him?" said the other, gesturing with her thumb to the old man, who was lying, annihilated, upon a divan, redder and puffier than ever. "Look at that! He'd be all too happy, if, at his age and without danger to his health, he could cram himself with meat and wines and still be able to stay with me afterwards."



X



IGHT DAYS had not rolled by, when Marthe found herself in possession of a large apartment, which she proceeded to furnish in wretched taste. To avenge herself for having had, formerly to eat with her fingers, she must now have silver plate, and she did not take care to forget, in her purchases, the imitation brass knobs, the rosewood trash, the looking-glass with frames too gilded and the eternal appliqués, set off with rose-colored candles. Her lover, however, did not complain. So long as his woman was eccentrically clad and permitted herself to be dragged to fine parties and the race-tracks, he was satisfied. Moreover, he was enchanted at hearing the pitying remarks of those who would roll their eyes and exclaim:

"That young idiot is in a fair way to ruin himself!"

The idea that he was capable of managing his own affairs was a ravishing one to him. Marthe was revolted by the absurdity of this creature. When he brought home with him a string of bearded blackguards, with their hair dressed like hussies and steeped in opoponax, and when, wallowing in the drawingroom, these strange beings would jabber for

DOWN STREAM

hours, celebrating, with an idiotic enthusiasm, the glory of "Tartine," who had won out by a length over "Jacinthe," relating how Saxifrage and Mascara had had the race stolen from them at the starting post, Marthe would clench her hands in a transport of rage.

She had, it is true, certain diversions. On the following Monday, her chaperon would bring home with him a group of men, very serious and very drunk, who would rest their chins in their hands and remark, with every appearance of mystic gravity:

"You know, I suppose, that tomorrow the market will be very uncertain, vacillating between the terms bid and the widespread distrust inspired by the depreciation of foreign values."

"Oh! I don't know. As for me, all I'm interested in is to know that Sargosse will be firm, and that it is going to pay excellent dividends."

"Pooh! At bottom, that's not a very brilliant future. If certain operations turn out, it is all too true that the market will waver, for if we except stocks, in which there are always bound to be a few transactions, the other values are sluggish enough. I am not speaking, you understand, of rail shares, which look very good."

"Oh!" exclaimed Marthe, revolted by this conversation, "I prefer the *voyous*!"

Her lover thought her ill-bred, but attributed this strange sally to the two glasses of champagne she had had.

MARTHE

Marthe reproached herself for her blunder, and from then on, did not say a word. From the very first day, her lover had been displeasing to her; she had hated him from the first night.

He had come home about two o'clock in the morning, with a chirping eye and a big cigar in his mouth. He talked about the horse he had picked for the next handicap, and drawing up, with a fine appearance of distraction, the bottoms of his trouser-legs, he permitted the lady he was keeping a glimpse of a rose-weave sock. When she failed to go into ecstasies over this bit of clownish elegance, he plucked at his finery and said to her, with protruding lips.

"Just see how supple this silk is."

She kept still, waiting for that banal courtesy, that chance amiability, which any one, however vile or debased he may be, shows, for the first night at least, to the woman whom he is supposed to have vanquished. She would have had to wait a long time! When he had finished his cigar and ground the ash into the rug with his foot, he murmured, in a satisfied manner:

"I'll bet you can't guess what's in this valise. No? Oh, it's funny, but women never can guess that one! Well, it's a night-gown!"

And he exhibited, with monstrous joy, a chemisette of maize-silk, trigged out with flame-colored ribbons.

For the first time since she had left him, Marthe thought of Leo. What a difference in the way these two men treated her upon first acquaintance! Where

DOWN STREAM

was the poet's sprightly respect, his slackened haste in undressing her? Leo would remove, one by one, her petticoats and unlace her corset, and then the silk would rustle about her hips, and her throat would round out at ease in the chemise, which fell from neck to foot. Then he would take her and carry her over to the bed, playing the marauder for kisses, while she would swoon, her body crushed in his arms. Undoubtedly, that first night she had come home with him, the first moments had been difficult, but once they had warmed to the struggle, what lively delights had they not tasted! The unforgettable memory of nights from which one emerges with red shoulders and nibbled tresses, the oppressing vision of moments when hands would go straying, of all those tender communings, all those breathless joys, obsessed her now anew, and, furious, she pushed her lover into the alcove, where he bumped against the wall and muttered, sleepily:

"Come, come! you know. You make me tired. Be still, will you?"

He formed the habit of coming every day to harass her with his presence. She could have strangled with joy this imbecile who, rooted to the spot, took an inventory of her person as she was going to bed! She came to be so importuned by this chap that she lost the taste for helping him consume his property. She would stay at home, lying in bed for whole days, smoking cigarettes and drinking grog, in a torpid annihilation. This solitude which she created about

MARTHE

her, having given up her calls on other women, this somnolence which would not leave her, could not but end as it had ended before, when she was living with the poet, in abominable drinking bouts. She drank, to excess, alcohol and beer, and when her head was filled with fumes, she would behold once more Leo's room, and the lover whom she had taken a pleasure in torturing would find a revenge in the persistent memory his kindness inspired.

Marthe wallowed in wine, to cheer herself up and to drive away forever the haunting image of the poet, but her stomach now went back on her, and she experienced atrocious inflammations of the abdomen. She was forced to interrupt these vinous self-drownings; and one evening, exasperated at not being able to sleep, her sick nerves ready to snap, she dressed herself, took a cab and had herself driven to the home of her former lover.

This was purely mechanical, purely unconscious. The gusts of air, coming in through the windows of the fiacre, brought her to herself. It was ten o'clock at night, and she was on the point of stopping the coachman and getting out of the vehicle. She must have been mad, indeed, to think of going to Leo's like this. Would he still be living at the same address? Would he be at home, and might he not have found some other woman? And then, what reception would he give her? If she had gone to see him the day after they had met at Ginginet's, there was no doubt that he would have sworn at her, no doubt that

DOWN STREAM

he would have tried to shame her, but in the end, there was also no doubt, he would have fallen into her arms. His rage would be over now, and with it, those inevitable consequences of anger: cowardice of the senses and weakness of the heart. He might, very simply, ask her to leave. Marthe was still hesitating, when the cab drew up. She made a gesture, which indicated that she meant to risk everything, rang the bell as quickly as she could, in order not to give herself time to turn back, climbed the stairs and, panting, knocked at his door. The door opened, and Leo, stupefied, looked at Marthe and said:

"It's you!"

"Yes you see, I was just passing through the quarter, and I thought I would come get some news of you Are you well?"

"Yes, but"

She stopped his mouth with her fingers:

"Come on. Don't say anything. Let's not talk any more about the past. What's done is done. And I haven't climbed your four flights of stairs to look for trouble. — Come on, let's talk of anything you want to. Are you working much? Are you having some fun? Have you found a publisher?"

Leo looked at the door with a bored air.

"Ah! so you're waiting for her," she murmured. "I should have known — I should have gone on — is she blonde or brunette?"

"Blonde and, what is more, decent."

"Decent! As if decent women came to a man's

MARTHE

rooms at eleven o'clock at night! She's like all the rest of us, by God! More or less of a swagger when she walks, more or less dash when she undresses! And afterwards? Come on, I want to see her; I'd like to scratch her hag's face, I would! and you'd soon see whether or not her decency would peel off — but how silly I am! What do I care whether she's decent or not."

At this moment, the doorbell rang.—The young man started, and Marthe felt that she was lost if the door opened. She planted herself in front of Leo and clung to his neck. He tried to disengage himself, but Marthe's eyes took fire and her lips burned with liquid flames as, panting and disheveled, she dragged him over to the window.—The bell rang again, louder this time.

"I love you," she whispered. "Don't open the door. I'll beat her up if she sets foot in here!"

He resigned himself, furious at being played with like this. The steps died away.—The two former lovers stood looking at each other, without saying a word.

Marthe came over, sat down on his knees and kissed him. He let her do it, but did not return her caresses. Then, as though succeeding at last in getting out an idea that had been hounding her, she cried:

"Oh! they're all alike! And do you expect me to love them! When they think no more of a woman than they do of an empty husk! It's the gentlemanly thing to cart one of them home and compromise her.

DOWN STREAM

That's what we're good for—to pity ourselves for having to live with such idiots and make them shout about having to keep company with such wenches. When they're tired of our trappings, it's good night, find another one, my girl! And they reproach us for pillaging fortunes! But, after all, *c'est la guerre!* and in war, you ravage and you plunder! Listen, you told me once about a woman—I can't remember her name; I'm not good at that—who was a statue. She came alive, you told me, under the kiss of the man who had made her. It's the contrary with us; we turn marble when they kiss us! Oh, if you only knew how tired I am of playing this part! Listen, it's not true, I didn't just happen to come here tonight; I came on purpose; I wanted to warm my feet against yours, and—it's silly, what I'm going to tell you—but, you see, there are days when it's good not to have to spend an evening with the rich ones. And then, it's quite natural, after all, to hate the one who keeps you!"

He was not listening. She made up her mind, then and there, to reconquer him. She seized his head in her arms and, covering it with kisses, she overwhelmed him with another charge of her lips!

He slept badly and arose at dawn, sat down in a chair and looked at the sleeping prostitute, her hair tumbling in a torrent over the white ravine of the pillows. He had had, decidedly, enough of her; she had been repugnant to him, ever since he had learned her manner of livelihood. He regarded her as des-

picable, above all women; and yet, how was he to avoid the bird-call of her eyes; how was he to escape the ambushade of her mouth?

She turned and, smiling, her head thrown back a little, her throat inflated, her chemise open, revealing a glimpse, under a mist of Mechlin lace, of white lightnings of flesh, she sighed gently. He gazed at her, astonished with himself because he no longer felt any desire for this woman, whom he once had kissed so ardently. He no longer felt anything but shame, a sort of sinking feeling, at having submitted to caresses which she, undoubtedly, distributed so generously to all whom she met in the course of business.

Certainly, the one who now came to see him was, as a mistress, inferior to Marthe. No more mad energy, no more carnal turbulence, but a profound quiet, an inertia that could not be awakened. Leo had picked her up one evening when he was slumming, and she had thriven under his care with the indifference of a vivacious plant. She was, moreover, married to and separated from a husband who had ground her down with blows of his fist; and yet, when she thought of him, great tears would stand in her eyes, and she would weep for her lot, repeating the statement that she would have loved to live with him and have children. She would have been unbearable, if she had not served the poet as a haven in which to refloat his distressed bark. He even had ended by becoming attached to this poor creature,

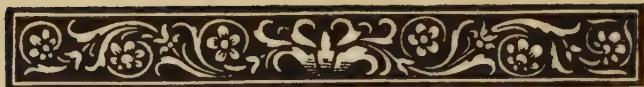
so timid that she did not dare raise her eyes and with so little coquettishness that she even slept in a striped-madras nightcap.

He regretted not having opened the door to her, and he was, at this moment, furious with Marthe. He avoided looking at her now, but she opened her eyes and called him over to the bed. He was almost on the point of falling under her charm again, so fascinating was she, with that gleaming throat of hers! But the daylight was sifting its golden dust through the curtains, and it showed him her face, black and blue with nocturnal bruises, along with that posture which revealed the prostitute who had been dragged through all the sewers of cities. He did not reply, but looked out the window and whistled.

Marthe arose, dressed herself slowly and said to him:

"You're right. After all, we *are* played out, my dear. I had thought I was going to find our old drunkenness again, but we haven't the strength, either one or the other of us, to bring it back to life. Better to have done with it all and not see each other any more. I'm going away, and for good this time."

She held out her hand to him. He could not refrain from kissing her on the cheek, and was more moved then he cared to admit as he let the door swing to behind her.



XI



MARTHE returned home, sullen and exhausted. Her lover had waited for her all night, and he had prepared for her return a series of phrases, half sentimental, half bantering. At the first words he uttered, she looked him in the face and said:

"Is the lease in my name?"

And when he replied that it was:

"In that case," she cried, "it wouldn't be a bad thing for you to clear out at once!"

He was astounded, stammered a few insults and finally took his shirt of foulard-silk and disappeared.

When he had left the room, she breathed again, and, running over to the cupboard, swallowed at one gulp a large glass of Kirsch, then, in a rage, seized the neck of the flagon and drank from the bottle.

This debauch made her ill and more melancholy than ever. A crowd of young fellows came to see her, proposing that they be permitted to replace their friend in her good graces. She preferred taking them all to enduring, alone, the company of a single one of them. And then, she began once more her old

life, feeling no tenderness whatever, no affection for all those who formed a chain about her bed. It was as though she were burned alive in an amorous conflagration. She came at last to the point where she took, as *amants de coeur*, ignoble fellows with big caps, wearing upon their temples that stigma of infamy, the kiss-curl. These latter disgusted her even more than the others, and she exhausted her ingenuity in arranging matters so that she would be able to spend the night alone.

Then, under the pale silk curtains, in the throes of that insomnia which she could not overcome, she would think of the past. She even came to weep for her little daughter, who had died at birth, and almost to love the young man who had taken care of her in that horrible crisis. Then, as her lamentable life unrolled before her, she shuddered, as she measured the depths of the slime into which she had sunk. When she came to that period of her existence during which she had served in the regiment of mercenaries, then, in the silence of her alcove, there would rise up in front of her, with its variegated costumes and its sinister cries of joy, the spectre of the house of prostitution.

She entered confusedly, and a few kindly souls, taking pity on her intoxication, said to her: "Don't be afraid; you'll soon be quite at home here." And then, they undressed her, and the only clothing she had left on her rose-hued body was a muslin dressing-gown. They brought in glasses, and she be-

gan playing Pope Joan and drinking groggy beer, until the arrival of M. Henri, the coiffeur, whose business it was to patch up the girls for the night. When each one had had a mop reared on the top of her cranium and, over her forehead, a lot of flowering bangs, they proceeded to drink absinthe or to shuffle the cards anew, as they waited for the time to dress for the rites of—it might be Lesbos, or it might be Cytherea. After dinner, everybody went downstairs into the drawingroom, where, upright on the threshold, Mother Jules stood guard.

Then, two, three or a score of persons would come in. They would order drinks, and the girls would go upstairs for the first time. Then the bell would ring again, and, jostling, tickling and pinching each other, all would come tumbling down stairs four at a time, whirling their theatric tinselings under the red and vaporish light of the gas-jets, or etching themselves, white and nude, against the imitation-marble walls.

When eleven o'clock came, the table was laid for supper, and all climbed the stairs another time and stuffed themselves with rings of Bologna, minced-ham sandwiches, and bits of rabbit garnished with apples. The bell would ring once again, and each one would swallow the morsel in her mouth and, for the twentieth time, they would surge, with the sound of a tempest, back into the market-room. All save one or two would go up again, to come down later with shining pieces of gold or silver in hand.

But it was about one o'clock in the morning that

the delirium would attain its supreme intensity. The customers would flow in. Then the gambols and the capers would commence, with incessant stampings and shoutings, as the girls vied with one another in silliness and high spirits. They would leap, flutter and twist themselves, their lips splashed with rose-lake, their teeth brushed with pumice-stone. Lashed by wine, spurred on by alcohol, they would kick and whinny or cast themselves, giddily, upon the divans.

Other times, at the end of the evening, about three o'clock in the morning, when all the girls were beginning to ask the men what time it was and to deafen them with the persistent demand: "Aren't you going to buy a drink?" a gentleman would enter and say to one of them: "Run along and dress yourself; I'm taking you home with me." And he would stand there, his legs crossed and smoking his cigar, while the purchase he had just made was being wrapped up in a package of black cloth. You could hear, then, calls on the staircase, the girl asking Madame for a chemise and hooking on, with pins, her borrowed petticoats. She finally would come down, relieved of her rouge and powder, and would go up and kiss her companions, as though, in leaving for a night of adventure, she feared she would never see them again. The pair would leave, and, leaning over the bannister, the proprietress would call out, in her short, sharp voice:

"I'll be expecting you at noon tomorrow. Don't loiter along the way."

MARTHE

There had been, in all this, a novel fascination for Marthe, the attraction of a void over which one leaned, in that life clipped off at a white-hot pace, those somersaults, those pirouettes, those glasses emptied with a motion of the elbow, those arguments over the possession of a ribbon or a man, those patchings-up of one's toilet between gallops. She recalled, with a singular pleasure, the ardent feverishness of that existence, which had made her writhe as in a delirium, like that vertiginous frenzy which causes howling derishes to leap and wail, to the turning of their wheels.

And then, there had been a sidetracking of all melancholy ideas, a voluntary abdication of all struggles here below, in this disorder, incessantly poked up, like a fire. The prison had removed all the difficulties of life. One did not have to concern one's self with anything anymore, except with getting enough money to lose at play and to get drunk on, if the customers refused to pay the bill. And yet, what misery and what abjectness! Undoubtedly, she was built for the contemptuous kisses of men, but the first few times, how the taste of that slime had stayed in her mouth!

The customer would get up in the morning and, sober now, would recognize the place where he had slept. Then, furious with himself and filled with loathing for the woman whose body he had grazed, he would shake the powder from his clothes and make his escape, without even saying goodbye. She

would hear his hurried step on the stairs; she would hear him as he paused by the door, waiting for the omnibus to pass, before leaping out into the street and taking to his heels.

And what a humiliation when she herself, having passed the night outside, would come back by daylight. The milkman and the butcher, smoking their pipes upon the steps of their shops, would greet her with insulting laughs and spit at her legs, in revenge for coming to kiss them at night.

At last, thanks to Ginginet, who had responded to her appeal, when she had told him she was ready to marry him, she was no longer subject to the Bureau of Manners; and the very thought of going once more to join this herd, which it is the duty of the police to keep an eye on and relentlessly track down, gave her a cold chill up her spine.

She did not misrepresent to herself the painful pleasures of this servitude, and yet, she found herself drawn to it as an insect is by the flame of a lamp. Anything—the perils of the tempest or the merciless chase—seemed to her better than this heart-breaking solitude which now threatened her.

She would awake from these visions with an unbalanced mind, her cheeks covered with perspiration. She felt suffocated in her room, and sometimes she would go down to take the air and walk along the walls, with the gait and gestures of a dying woman. The freshness of the morning and the clear sunlight would chase away these dreams,

and she would sink upon a bench, in a public park or square, gazing at the ground which she hollowed out with the toe of her shoe and sifting, through her fingers, the fine-powdered earth. But all the children making mud pies in white iron pails exasperated her; they recalled the time when she, too, flat on her belly in the dust, had planted tree-branches upon a pile of pebbles. She took, then, to wandering about Paris; and one day, walking quite by chance, she found herself, at the turning of a road, in front of a public barracks, at the hour when the beggars were coming there to seek their soup.

She paused at a sort of blind-alley, bounded on the north by this *caserne* and a few wine-shops, where, in the shadow of boxed pine-trees a few old men were drinking, with paunches on them like malt-kilns, and on the south by a stall selling fried stuffs and pancakes, an interloping restaurant, with its bowls of milk and rice and tremulous cream-cheeses, as well as by a sordid bric-a-brac shop, at the door of which, in disarray, hung a number of crinolines, their flesh eaten away and their iron-wire carcasses clinking in the breeze.

Still nearer, at the entrance of the alley, three trees with holed trunks reared from their earthen sleeves arms that were disconsolate and deformed.

A shovelful of wretched old women had been dumped into the gutter at the foot of these three trees. There were, among them, poor creatures with shorn bosoms and clayey complexions, a troop of

DOWN STREAM

bandy-legged and one-eyed females, and several liters of snotty-nosed street urchins, who made an incomparable noise through their nostrils, as though they were snuffing a candle, sucking their fingers as they waited for the hour of the handout.

Seated side by side, crouched down or leaning against one another, they played with all sorts of unheard of receptacles: casseroles without stems; sandstone pots bound up with pack-thread; decrepit camp-kettles; broken porridge-platters; foot-warmers without handles and flower-pots with stuffed bottoms.

A soldier made a sign, and all rushed forward, with lowered heads, yelping like mastiffs. Then, when their basins were filled they fled with voracious glances and, with their behinds on the sidewalk and their feet in the gutter, greedily gobbled their food.

Marthe shuddered at the sight of an old man, drinking his soup by himself from a *chaufferette*. Wholly taken aback, she gazed upon that face, packed in a grizzled beard, those blinking, troubled eyes, that piercing nose, all sugar-burnt with red, and the flabby-death-like crust of those cheeks. That peeling cranium, those tatters seamed with coarse thread, those clothes the color of cow-dung, those moth-eaten trousers, starred with holes and cuirassed with mud, that shriveled waistcoat, gnawed and shrunken by all the suns and all the rains, those nameless shoes, misshapen and down-at-the-heel, with a dormer-window of russet leather for the big toe to look out of, that face, finally, ravaged by every excess,

MARTHE

those palsied hands—all moved her to a poignant pity, and she turned pale, as the beggar approached her and whispered:

"You don't recognize me? I am Ginginet."

"Oh!" she said, dumfounded. "How . . . so it's you? And you have come to this!"

"It had to be. I've eaten everything, drunk everything, and I've gone bankrupt like a true merchant. Eaten out of house and home, my dear. And with all that, no voice any more; I can't get out a sound; my bell-clapper's gone for good. I must have, very carelessly, swallowed it in the bottom of a litre. Eh? I'm changed, am I not? Ah, *dame!* I simply dress without any pretence, without any *chic*. My Elbeuf's a bit out of shape, my booby-hatch has lost a screw and my shoes are sloshy—but what do you expect! That's what a fellow gets for being poverty-stricken and always with a thirst! But come, let's talk about you for a while. Do you know, you're still cute and, what's more, famously togged out. You must be rich! Oh, well, then, you ought to be able to lend me a few sous to go drink a pint."

And stretching out a frightful stump, he added, with a terrifying laugh:

"A buttercup, my princess; it will bring you luck."

Something like an explosive intoxication was visible in Marthe's eyes.

"Ah!" she said, "since the time you used to beat me, you haven't had any luck. It must go hard with you, eh, to have to ask me for charity?"

DOWN STREAM

Then, at sight of that face, tanned and, as it were, smoked out by misery, her boasting mood fell from her, pity laid hold of her heart, and she kissed the old comedian's hideous beard, pouring out for him all that she had in her pocket.

"Bah!" she said. "One of us is as good as the other. It would be all the same, old dear, if we had it to do all over again! But, do you know, I think it would have been better to trudge and drudge. It might have brought in a little more!"



XII



THE MAN who, at the hôpital de Lariboisière, is assigned, at once, to keeping the records of and to sweeping out the autopsy room pushed open the little door which separates this room from the morgue, drew the white curtains of the cots, dusted off the altar, replenished the supply of chlorine in the earthen pans, pinned back on a wooden coffin a permit which had blown off, rewrapped the foot of a woman in her shroud, drank a cup of wine, and, without appearing to be in the least inconvenienced by the frightfully stale odor of the two rooms, passed back into the first one, which he proceeded to scrub, with formidable reinforcements in the way of pails of water.

This room was furnished exclusively with lined trestles of zinc and with a fountain which gurgled near the door. The attendant cast, in passing, an indifferent glance upon the cadaver of an old man, lying on a slab, with legs drawn together, a belly as swollen as a balloon and an atrociously revulsive face. Then, taking a sponge, he set about scouring the dissecting tables.

DOWN STREAM

He made sure that none of the holes were stopped up—and that the white-iron pail was properly suspended beneath each orifice. He deposited his dripping sponge in the basin of the fountain, took another swig of wine and perceived a large red stain in the culvert. Seized with a sudden passion for cleanliness, he set about ranging along the wall a bucket filled with sawdust, a pair of galoshes, and two short-necked bottles in which was to be seen, pickled in a bath of alcohol, a horrible slimy substance, veined with red. His next task was to draw the cords to the casements which topped the two windows. Whereupon, he left the room and betook himself to the presence of two internes in black trousers and white aprons, who were just closing the door to the *salle Saint-Ferdinand*.

"All the same," one of them was saying, "when they brought that poor old *Ginginet* in upon a litter, it was just like a jolt in the stomach to me. I relived, in one minute, all my past life. I recalled the time, when, clad in a red oilskin, I used to yell down from *Bobinche's* henhouse, insulting *Ginginet* and applauding *Marthe*. And then, I recalled that famous night when I took *Leo* down to the *rue de Lourcine*.

"By the way," said the other, "what's become of your friend, *Leo*?"

"Oh, my dear fellow! That's a whole story in itself! He finally decided to answer my letter. Imagine . . . but no, wait a minute, read his letter; I assure you, it's a curious one."

It was at this moment that the caretaker joined them.

"Well, père Machin," they said to him, "what's new?"

"I was just looking for you," coughed the old man. "There is, it appears an interesting subject. This morning, they are going to dissect a man who died from boozing too much. He had, the doctor says, a lot of diseases, each one more astonishing than the others. But you must have heard them talking about him, Monsieur Charles. It's No. 28 in the salle Saint-Vincent.

"Ah! the dickens," cried the young fellow, "why, it must be Ginginet who's dead, and here I was just going to inquire about him! Well! At least, we'll go to the poor devil's autopsy!"

And they hastened their steps. The session had not begun yet; after shaking hands with the others present, the pair leaned against the fountain and, unfolding a letter, proceeded to read, in a half-whisper:

"You ask me what I am doing, and how I pass my time? I wander, my friend, along the banks of a river, I watch the water as it flows past, and I do not fish! — I walk and I sleep — I also water the flowers, I smoke black-bottomed pipes, I drink sour wine, I eat succulent ratas,—which is to say, I am doing ravishingly well, and have had a devil of a time to find an ink-pot to write these few lines.

DOWN STREAM

"But let us talk now of those whom I have left behind, it will soon be two months now, in Paris.—Marthe, you tell me, has gone back to the brothel where she used to live. Oh! you might, in breaking this news to me, have saved yourself circumlocutions of any sort. All was over between us, and you knew it.—I not only have no affection for her; I no longer even have any interest in her. Her life, from now on, will not change much. Let us admit some further alternations between riches and misery, and that will be about all. She will end in a fit of drunkenness, or else, some day when she has good sense, she will throw herself into the Seine. In truth, it is not worth our while bothering about her, and moreover, what do I care what becomes of her? For I may as well give you a big piece of news: I am married.

"Oh! no exclamations!—Listen, when we used to meet at my house, what jokes, what silly remarks we made on the subject of marriage! They were banal; they were stupid.—Two individuals met, at an appointed hour, to the sound of an organ, in the presence of guests who were impatient to go and consume the food they knew would cost them nothing. Then, at the end of a definite number of months, barring accident, they would bring into the world one or more awful brats, who would squall for whole nights under the pretence that they were suffering with their teeth. And so, to the crackling of our pipes, we decreed, then and there, that an artist should never seriously think of putting on the yoke of petticoats.

MARTHE

"How you have made me yawn, times past, with your talk of liberty, which marriage was supposed to strangle! And yet, you had barely left my place when you would run to lose that same liberty with a lot of chippies! Ah wasn't that because you didn't despise them as much as I did, those whores with whom you said you were smitten? Yet wasn't it true that when we were in their presence, all our well-bred instincts rebelled against their native grossness? And don't you think you will end up like me, content to marry, as so many others among us have done, the daughter of some fortune-teller or concierge, who will go on telling fortunes with cards, but who will neglect to comb her hair from the day she trails her skirts across the floor of a townhall? And still happier those of our comrades who have wives with petticoats fastened up with pins and enormous mops of hair that shake in the wind! These, at least, sometimes have the sense to keep their mouths shut, but when one does like our friend, Brice, and marries a daughter of Bohemia, when God knows who was there first! A plump wench who hides, under carnivalesque attire, the graces of a washerwoman, and who yet wants to play the fine lady, imposing herself even where she is not invited and demanding a place at table where she ought to be serving—all this becomes simply odious, for these women have about them the ordure of the gutter; it rattles in their mouths, and they loosen it up at dessert, along with the stays of their corset!

"And see what has happened to the rest of us, the Independents! To marry one's mistress is to be as stupid as Gribouille, who, from fear of the rain, hurled himself into the water. And then again, one must first find the mistress. I've had them, God knows! Women by the glassful, but the wine had a bitter taste! And it was then I started running after those lasses who, of a Sunday, hang to the arms of working men, but they didn't love me! I was not of their world; they found me a poseur—stupid, in short; and yet, one of them was enamored of me for eight days. This was too much, my dear fellow. I had to go out with her without her hat and stand for her peals of laughter in the street. I also had to endure such abominable expressions as: 'That's right, sure thing, you tell 'em!'"

"Oh, well! it was after these promenades that I came to seek out, among the prostitutes, the spiciest toilets I could find, in the attempt to discover, in the highlights of powder and rouge, something that would awaken my desires; I wanted to rejoice in the presence of a throat swimming in a mist of lace, torn by the lightening of wan ribbons! And I was sincere then! I loved a woman less for herself than I did for her bows and chiffons. What an absurdity! And today, now that I have come back to my senses, how astonished I am with myself for having been so foolish! I would not add to your stupor by entering upon a eulogy of my wife. Don't worry; I'm not going to tell you that she is beautiful, that she has

MARTHE

eyes of sapphire or of jet, or that her lips are of cinnabar. No, she is not even pretty, but what difference does that make to me? It will be commonplace enough to look at her, of an evening, as she sits darning my socks and permitting me to be deafened by the cries of my young imps: we'll agree on that. But since, despite all our theorizing, we have not been able to find anything better, I shall make myself content with this life, however banal it may appear to you.

"What more is there for me to say? I am not a proud Sicambrian, but I AM burning what I have worshiped And as for Marthe, since you speak of her again at the end of your letter, I pardon her all her villanies and all her treasons. Prostitutes like her have this much good in them, that they lead us to love those who are not like them, they serve to drive us back to decency. But I am wearying you, am I not, old man? Pardon all these repetitions, and let me grasp your hand."

"In the name of God!" exclaimed the young fellow, folding the letter.

But their comrades were elbowing them to keep still; and Père Briquet, slitting with a stroke of his scalpel the cranium of the old comedian, was beginning, in his droning voice:

"Alcoholism, gentlemen"

DOWN STREAM

A vau-l'Eau





I



HE *garçon* placed his left hand on his hip, rested his right hand on the back of a chair, balanced himself on a single foot and screwed up his lips. ¶ "*Dame*," he said, "that is a matter of taste; as for me, if I were in Monsieur's place, I should order Roquefort."

"Oh, well, bring me a Roquefort."

And M. Jean Folantin, seated at a table laden with dishes, a curdled mess in which scraps of meat mingled with empty bottles, the bottoms of which stamped the table cloth with a blue seal—M. Folantin made a mouth, not doubting that the cheese he had ordered would turn out to be a desolating one. His expectations were in no wise deceived; the *garçon* brought him something that resembled white lace mottled with indigo, evidently cut from a cake of Marseilles soap.

M. Folantin dallied with this cheese for a moment, then folded his napkin and arose, his back receiving the salute of the *garçon* who closed the door behind him.

Once outside, M. Folantin opened his umbrella and hastened his steps. The keen-edge sword of a

DOWN STREAM

cold that bit one's nose and ears had been succeeded by the fine lash of a driving rain. The harsh and icy spell of winter weather, which for three days had lain over Paris, was slackening, and the melting snows were plashing away under a sky so swollen that it looked as though it were drowning with water.

M. Folantin was galloping now, thinking of the fire he had lighted in his room before going to eat in his restaurant.

To tell the truth, he was not without his fears; by an extraordinary circumstance, indolence had kept him that evening from rebuilding, top to bottom, the pile of fuel his concierge had prepared. Coke is so hard to catch, he reflected; and leaping his stairs, four at a time, he perceived, upon entering the room, no flame in the chimney.

"One would think there were no housekeepers, no porters who know how to build a fire," he grumbled; and placing his candle on the rug, without taking off his street clothes or even removing his hat, he reversed the grate and filled it again, methodically, with due regard to the drafts of air. He lowered the drop, consumed a number of matches and a quantity of paper and then began undressing.

Suddenly, he sighed, for his lamp was indulging in profound belches.

"That's a fine how-do-you-do: there's no oil! Oh, well, that's only one thing more: it's complete now!" And he regarded, in distress, the wick which he had

DOWN STREAM

just lifted out, a wick dead and yellow, burned away at the top and slashed with black teeth-marks.

"This life is intolerable," he remarked, looking for his scissors. He repaired his light in half-way fashion, then threw himself into an easy chair and became lost in his reflections.

The day had been an unpleasant one; from the morning on, it had been black. The head of the office, where he had been employed for twenty years, had, impolitely, reproached him for being later than usual in arriving.

M. Folantine had been obdurate and, drawing out his turnip, had remarked, dryly, "Eleven o'clock exactly."

The boss, in his turn, had drawn from his pocket a small clock.

"Eleven-twenty," he had replied. "I go by the Exchange," And with a disdainful air, he had consented to excuse his employe, out of pity for the antique piece of watch-making the latter had exhibited.

M. Folantin had seen, in this ironic manner of disciplining him, an allusion to his poverty and had answered his superior spiritedly. The latter, accepting no longer the senile vagaries of a watch, had bridled up and, in threatening terms, had reproached M. Folantin once more for being unpunctual.

The day, begun wrong, had continued unbearable. By an ambiguous daylight that blurred his paper, he had had to copy interminable letters, to draw up innumerable descriptions and to listen, at the

DOWN STREAM

same time, to the silly chatter of a colleague, a little old man who, with his hands in his pockets, loved to hear himself talk.

The latter would recite the contents of the entire newspaper and would prolong his recital by adding comments of his own, or else he would criticize the policy of editors and mention others whom he would be glad to see take the places of the ones he was firing; and he would mingle with these observations, details regarding the bad state of his health, which, he asserted, was improving a slight bit, nevertheless, thanks to the use of a patent ointment and constant cold-water baths.

As a result of listening to these interesting remarks, M. Folantin had ended by making a mistake; the lines of his ledger had jumped, and the columned figures had gone on a stampede; he had had to scratch out whole pages and overburden others, to no avail, however, for the boss had returned his work with the order to do it over again.

The day had finally come to an end, and under a lowering sky, in the midst of squalls, M. Folantin had had to traipse through parfaits of mud and sherbets of snow in order to reach his lodgings and his restaurant; and there, to cap the climax, the dinner had been execrable and the wine had tasted like ink.

With frozen feet, compressed in boots stiffened by the shower and puddles, his cranium white-hot from the gas-jet that hissed above his head, M.

DOWN STREAM

Folantin had eaten little or nothing. His bad luck was with him still. His fire now hesitated, his lamp smoldered and his tobacco was damp and went out, wetting the cigarette-paper with yellow juice.

A great discouragement laid hold of him; the emptiness of his walled-in life was apparent to him, and, even as he stirred the coke with his poker, leaning forward over the arm of his chair, his forehead resting on the ledge of the mantel, M. Folantin set himself to traversing the way of the cross which constituted his forty-two years, pausing in despair at each of the stations.

His childhood had not been of the most prosperous sort; from father to son, the Folantins had been without a sou. The family records, it is true, going back to a remote period, told of one Gaspard Folantin who had made nearly a million in the hides and leather trade; but the chronicle added that, after having devoured his fortune, he had died a bankrupt. The memory of this individual was a lively one in the minds of his descendants, who cursed him heartily, holding him up to their offspring as an example that was not to be followed, threatening them with dying in the gutter, like him, if they frequented cafés or ran after women.

Jean Folantin had been born under conditions disastrous enough. The day his mother's labor came to an end, his father possessed, as his sole earthly goods, some ten or twelve small pieces of silver. An aunt who, without being a midwife, was expert

at this sort of thing, had taken charge of the infant, rubbed him with butter, and, out of economy, in place of lycopodium, had powdered his thighs with flour scraped from bread-crust.

"You can see from this, my lad, that your birth was humble," his Aunt Eudore, who had acquainted him with these details, had said to him; and Jean had not dared hope for a great deal of well-being in the future.

His father had died very young, and the stationer's shop which he had kept in the rue du Four was sold to liquidate the debts incurred through his illness, while mother and child found themselves upon the street. Madame Folantin obtained a place and became a shop-girl, later a cashier in a linen shop. The child became a boarder in a *lycée*. Although Madame Folantin was, really, in a most unfortunate situation, she managed to scrape together a little money, depriving herself of everything and economizing through months of poverty, in order to be able later to defray the expenses of her son's examinations and his graduation.

Jean was aware of the sacrifices his mother was making and worked as hard as he could, carrying off all the prizes, thus making up, in the eyes of the steward, for the contempt which his situation as a poor devil of a scholar inspired, by the success he won in the *grand concours*. He was a very intelligent lad and, despite his youth, already staid enough. When he viewed the miserable existence which his

DOWN STREAM

mother led, shut up from morning to night in a glass cage, coughing, her hand over her mouth, above her books, and yet remaining, all the while, gentle and timid amid the insolent confusion of a shop thronged with customers—at sight of this, he understood that he could count upon no clemency on the part of fate, no justice from destiny.

He also had had the good sense not to listen to the suggestions of his professors, who, with a view to enhancing their own reputations, had urged him to go on and win honors; and so, without wasting any time, he had taken his baccalaureate at the end of his second year.

It was necessary for him at once to find a place that would enable him to relieve the heavy burden his mother bore. He went a long time without discovering one, for his unprepossessing appearance was not in his favor, and he was lame in the left leg, as the result of an accident he had met with at school in his childhood. Finally, however, his ill luck appeared to change; Jean competed for a position as employe in a ministerial office and won it, along with a salary of fifteen hundred francs.

When her son announced this good news, Madame Folantin smiled in her gentle way.

"So now, you are your own master," she said. "You don't need anybody else any more. My poor lad, it was high time."

And from then on, her feeble health had grown worse from day to day. A month afterward she had

died, following a severe cold caught in the drafty cage in which, in winter as in summer, she had remained seated for so long.

Jean was now alone. His Aunt Eudore had been buried a long while since. His other relatives were either dead or scattered; he had not known them, any way; it was the best he could do to remember the name of a cousin, who was at present in a convent in the provinces.

He had formed a few comradeships, made a few friends; but the moment always came when they would leave Paris or marry, and he had not had the courage to form new alliances; and so, little by little, he had abandoned himself to solitude and had come to live alone.

"All the same, solitude is trying," he reflected now, arranging, one by one, the chunks of coke in the grate, as he thought of his ancient comrades. How marriage altered everything! They had *thou'd* one another, they had led the same life, they had not been able to do without one another's company, and now they barely nodded when they met in the street. The married friend is always a trifle embarrassed, for it is he who has broken off relations; he imagines, moreover, that one is laughing at the new life he is leading, and he ends by being persuaded, in good faith, that he occupies a more honorable position in the world than that of celibate. So ran M. Folan-tin's thoughts, as he recalled the constraint, the arrogancy almost of old comrades whom he had met

DOWN STREAM

since their marriage. All that was very stupid! And he smiled, for the memory of these companions of his youth brought him back, forcefully, to the time when he had known their companionship.

He had been twenty-two then and had found everything amusing. The theatre had appeared to him a place of delight, the café an enchantment, and Bullier, with its girls parading their torsos to the sound of cymbals and shindying with a foot in the air, had inflamed him, for in his ardor, he had pictured these girls as undressed and had visioned, beneath their pantaloons and petticoats, the moist and palpitant flesh. A whole feminine bouquet had breathed from the vortex of dust, and he had remained there, ravished and envying the fellows in soft hats who played the ring-master by slapping the girls on their thighs. As for himself, he was lame, he was timid, and he had no money. No matter, this punishment was sweet, and, like plenty of poor devils, he was content with nothing. A word tossed him in passing, a smile darted above a shoulder would render him joyous; and upon returning home, he would dream of these women and would imagine that those who had bestowed a look upon him and who had given him a smile were better than the others.

Ah! if only his salary had been more!—Deprived of money as he was and not being in a position to pick up girls at a dance, he had to be satisfied with waiting in the corridors for those unfortunate ones

whose big bellies nearly brushed the sidewalk. He would plunge into the passage-way, in an effort to distinguish a face lost in the shadows, and grossness of coloring, the horror of age, ignominy of toilette or abjectness of surroundings were, alike, powerless to stop him. As in those pot-houses where his hearty appetite led him to devour villainous foods, so his carnal hunger rendered him immune to amorous rebuffs. There were even nights when, without a sou and, as a consequence, without hope of satisfaction, he would walk in the rue de Buci, in the rue de l'Egout, in the rue du Dragon, in the rue Neuve-Guillemin, in the rue Beurrière, in order to bump against some woman. He was happy to receive an invitation, and when he had scraped acquaintance with one of these street-walkers, he would talk with her, exchange good-evening and then retire, from fear of scaring away business. And he would sigh for the end of the month, promising himself rare pleasures as soon as he should receive his stipend.

Those were the happy days!—And to think that now, when he was a little better off, when he might feed in better pastures and exhaust himself on more alluring couches—to think that now he no longer cared for anything! Money had come too late, at a time when no pleasure longer beckoned.

But there had been an intermediate period between those first overwhelming turbulences of youth and his present state when, without curiosity, almost impotent, he was content to remain at home, in an

DOWN STREAM

easy chair before the fire. About his twenty-seventh year, he had been seized with disgust for the women scattered through his quarter. He had looked for a little cajolery, a little petting; his dream was no longer to hurl himself precipitately upon a divan, but to sit down a while and take his time. Since his resources forbade his keeping a woman, since he was puny and possessed of no social graces, no libertine gayety, no blather, there was nothing left for him, except to reflect at his ease upon the goodness of a Providence that gives money, honor, health and women—all to some and none to others. He should have been satisfied still with banal little mock-feasts, but since he was able to pay more, he had betaken himself to houses a little better kept, with a little whiter linen.

Once, he had believed he was happy. He had made the acquaintance of a working girl. The latter had showed him what amounted almost to tenderness, but on the evening of the next day, without reason, she had decamped, leaving him a souvenir of which he had had some difficulty in curing himself. He shuddered as he recalled this period of suffering, when he had found difficulty in going to his office and even in walking. It is true, he was still young at that time and, in place of visiting the nearest physician, had had recourse to charlatans, without pausing to take account of the inscriptions that riddled their advertisements—veridical inscriptions, like the following: "Depurative remedy—yes, for the pocket-

book." Or threatening, like this one: "You'll lose your hair." Or philosophic and resigned, like this other: "Better sleep with your wife from now on." And everywhere, the word "free" joined to the word "treatment" had been effaced, scooped out and ravaged with strokes of the knife, on the part of those who, obviously, had accomplished this task with conviction and with rage.

And now, his amorous days were well over, his impluses well repressed. Those panting, feverish days had been succeeded by a profound continence, a profound peace. But at the same time, what an abominable void had been hollowed out of his existence since the moment sensual questions had ceased to occupy a place in his life!

"All that is nothing to laugh at," thought M. Folantin, wagging his head and swearing at his fire.

"It is freezing here," he murmured. "It is too bad wood is so dear. What a fine flame it would make!"

And this reflection led him to think of the plentiful supplies of wood that were distributed to the ministry, to the government and to his own office.

The office. There also his illusions had been of short duration. Beginning with the belief that one reached a superior position through good conduct and industry, he had come to perceive that protection was everything. Employes born in the provinces were supported by their deputies; and so, they arrived, whether or no. He had been born in Paris, he was aided by no one, and so, had remained a simple

clerk, spending his time, for years, in copying and recopying piles of dispatches, in drawing up innumerable documents, in building up great masses of accounts and in repeating, thousands of times, the unvarying salutations of protocols. His zeal for this sport had grown cold, and now, without any expectation of reward, without any hope of advancement, he was no longer as diligent or as devoted as he might have been.

With his 237 fr. 40 c. a month, he never had been able to install himself in convenient lodgings, to take a maid and to regale himself in slippers, with his feet at the fire. An unfortunate experiment, one day when he was very tired, an experiment launched against all likelihood and in spite of all good sense, had proved decisive; and at the end of two months, he had had to go a-voyaging once more among the restaurants, glad enough to be free of his house-keeper, Madame Chabanel, an old hag of six feet, with hairy lips and a pair of obscene eyes, planted above her flaccid hog's cheeks. She was a sort of vivandière, who guzzled food like a teamster and drank like four teamsters. She was a wretched cook, and her familiarity exceeded the limits of the possible. She would deposit the dishes, in any fashion, upon the table and then would take a seat facing her master and proceed to chapel the ship under her skirts, whinying hilariously, with her bonnet on her head and her hands upon her haunches.

It was impossible to find a servant; but M. Folan-

DOWN STREAM

tin might, possibly, have been able to put up with a humiliating lack of ceremony, if this astonishing lady had not stripped him as naked as a babe in the wood; his flannel waistcoats and his socks disappeared, his old shoes were not to be found, his liquors took volatile flight, and even the matches burned themselves up.

There had had to be an end to this state of things; and so, M. Folantin, from fear this woman would pillage him completely during his absence, had had to collect his courage and provoke a scene one evening, discharging her upon the spot.

Madame Chabanel turned crimson, and her toothless mouth dropped; then she began to flutter and cut capers, when M. Folantin said to her, in an amiable tone:

"Since I am not going to eat in any more, I should prefer you to have the benefit of the provisions that remain, rather than let them go to waste; and so, if you like, we will go look them over together and see what there is."

And then, he had opened the cupboards.

"This is a sack of coffee, and this bottle contains brandy, does it not?"

"*Oui, Monsieur*, that's what it is," Madame Chabanel had groaned.

"Oh, well, that's a good thing to keep," said M. Folantin. "I'll take it along."

And so it was with everything. Mother Chabanel did not fall heir, in the end, to more than two sous-

DOWN STREAM

worth of vinegar, a pinch of bay-salt and a little glass of lamp-oil.

"*Ouf!*" exclaimed M. Folantin, when she had descended the stairs, stumbling over the steps; but his joy had been short-lived; ever since that time, his household had gone awry. The Widow Chabanel had been replaced by the concierge, who beat the bed with his fists and tamed the spiders by sparing their webs.

From that day, his food had been as improbable as it was indeterminate. His visits to the cattle-feeders of the quarter had not ceased, and his stomach had grown rusty. The period of *eaux de Saint-Galmier* and of Seltzer water, of mustard to mask the stale taste of victuals and prick up the cold lye-wash of sauces, had then set in.

As a result of evoking all this crew of memories, M. Folantin fell into a frightful melancholy. He had, for years, valiantly undergone solitude, but this evening, he confessed himself vanquished. He regretted not having married and turned over in his mind, pro and con, the arguments he was accustomed to retail when preaching celibacy for the poor.

"Eh, what, children? One would rear them somehow; one would pinch one's belly a little more. The devil! I should do like all the others. I should harness myself to copying of an evening, in order that my wife might be better provided for; we should eat meat only of a morning and, like the majority of petty households, we should be content with a plate

DOWN STREAM

of soup at dinner. Yet what are these privations compared to an organized existence, an evening passed between one's child and one's wife, food none too abundant but truly wholesome, linen clean and brought back at regular hours? The laundry, ah! what a song and dance for a bachelor! They come to me when they have time, and they bring me back my shirts soft and blue, my handkerchiefs in tatters, my socks riddled with holes like a sieve; and they laugh at me when I am angry! And all this will end in the poor house or in the Maison Dubois, if the malady keeps up; or here, invoking the pity of a sick-nurse, if death is prompt.

"Too late . . . no more virility . . . marriage is impossible . . . I've surely made a mess of my life. . . . And now, the best thing I can do," sighed M. Folantin, "is to go to bed once more and sleep."

And whilst he was opening his covers and arranging his pillows, certain acts of grace took place in his soul, in celebration of the pacific benefits of a succouring couch.



II



EITHER the next day nor the day after was M. Folantin's melancholy to be dissipated; incapable of reacting against the spleen that crushed him, he permitted himself to drift down stream. Mechanically, under a rainy sky, he repaired to his office, left it, ate and went to bed at nine o'clock, only to begin again, the following day, a life that was of the same pattern; little by little, he slipped into an absolute numbness of mind.

Then, one morning, he had an awakening. It seemed to him he had emerged from a lethargy. The weather was clear, and the sun struck the windows, which were damasked with frost. Winter had set in again, but luminous and dry. M. Folantin arose, murmuring, "The deuce, but it's nipping." He felt wholly enlivened. That was not all; he must find a remedy for these attacks of hypochondria, he told himself.

After long deliberation, he decided not to live so shut up any more and to vary his restaurants. Only, if these resolutions were easy to make, they were, on the other hand, difficult to put into practice. He dwelt in the rue des Saints-Pères, and restaurants were lack-

ing. The sixth *arrondissement* was pitiless towards a celibate. One had to be ordained a priest in order to find comfort in the form of special dinners at *tables d'hôte* reserved for ecclesiastics; that was the only way one could live in this network of streets surrounding the Church of Saint-Sulpice. Except for the religious, there was no food to be had, at least not unless one were rich and able to frequent smart houses. M. Folantin, not being able to fulfill these conditions, was under the necessity of limiting himself to repasts at the hands of the few traitorous wretches scattered, here and there, in his neighborhood. It seemed, surely, that this part of the *arrondissement* was inhabited only by concubines or married folk. "If I only had the courage to abandon it," M. Folantin would sigh, from time to time. But his office was there; moreover, he had been born there, and his family had lived there constantly; all his memories clung to this tranquil old corner of the town, already being disfigured by the cutting through of new streets and funereal boulevards, roasting-hot in summer and frozen over in winter, and by distressing avenues, which had Americanized the aspect of the quarter and destroyed forever its intimate allure, without having brought it, in exchange, any advantages in the form of comfort, of gayety or of life.

"One must cross the water in order to dine," M. Folantin kept repeating to himself, but a profound disgust seized him the moment he set foot on the left

bank. Then, too, he had difficulty in walking with his limping foot, and he abominated the omnibus. In short, the idea of foraging, of an evening, for his pasturage gave him goose-flesh. He preferred to try out all the wine-merchants and all the soup-kitchens that he had not yet visited in the neighborhood of his domicile.

And so, he suddenly deserted the pot-house where he usually ate from force of habit. He first began haunting the *bouillons*, had recourse to the waitresses whose nun's costumes evoked the idea of a hospital refectory. He dined there a few days, until his hunger, pulled up short by the effluvia of burnt meat about the place, refused longer to stomach the insipid food, rendered still more tasteless by cataplasms of chicory and greens. What a desolation was exhaled from those cold marbles, those doll-like tables, that immutable bill-of-fare, those infinitesimal portions, those mouthfuls of bread! Drawn up in two opposite rows, the customers appeared to be playing a game of chess, disposing their utensils, their bottles and their glasses cross-wise, as on a board. And with his nose buried in a newspaper, M. Folantin envied the solid jaws of his neighbors, grinding away at the shreds of sirloin which flew under their forks. Out of disgust with oven-cooked foods, he fell back upon eggs. He ordered them turned over and well done, but generally they were brought to him almost raw, and he was forced to sponge away, with a crumb of bread, the yellow swimming in a pile of white, and

DOWN STREAM

to take it up with a little spoon. It was bad, it was dear, and, above all, it was desolating. Enough of that, said M. Folantin, let's try something else.

But everywhere it was the same; the inconveniences merely varied with the place. At the better known wine-shops, the food was better, the wine had a tarter taste, the portions were more copious; but as a general thing, the meal lasted two hours, and the *garçon* was busy serving the drunks seated below at the counter. Elsewhere, in this deplorable quarter, the fare ordinarily consisted of chops and steaks, for which one paid a good price, since, in order to avoid seating you with the working men, the proprietor had to shut you up in a separate room and light a couple of gas-jets.

Finally, in dropping lower still and frequenting the out-and-out *mannezingues*, or saloons of the lowest class, the company was repulsive and the filth stupefying; the meat stunk, the glasses bore the marks of mouths, the knives were thick and unpolished, and the cloths preserved the yellow of eggs long since eaten.

M. Folantin asked himself if the change was worth while, seeing the wine was everywhere laden with litharge and cut with pump-water, seeing that eggs were never cooked as one desired them and the food was always juiceless, while the boiled peas resembled the remains of out-houses. But he grew stubborn. "If I look long enough, I may find a place." And he continued to roam about among the wine-shops and

DOWN STREAM

the dairy-lunches. In place of weakening, however, his lassitude increased, especially when, upon returning home, he would inhale, upon the stairs, the odor of broths, when he would glimpse rays of light under the doors, when he would meet his neighbors coming from the cellar with bottles, and when he would hear busy steps running about in the rooms. Everything, even to the perfume that escaped from the concierge's lodge, where the latter sat with his elbows on the table and the visor of his cap stained with the steam mounting from his bowl of soup—everything awakened his regrets. He even came near repenting having ridded himself of Mother Chabanel, odious penny-clutcher that she was.

"If I had had the means, I should have kept her, in spite of her distressing manners," he told himself.

He was in despair, for to his moral worries was added now a physical breakdown. From lack of nourishment, his health, frail to begin with, was tottering. He resorted to iron, but all the martial preparations that he swallowed merely ruined his intestines, without any other appreciable result. Then he adopted arsenic, but the Fowler's knocked his stomach out without giving him any strength. Finally, as a last resort, he employed quinquina, which set him afire. Then he mixed them all together, but it was labor lost. His funds were now exhausted, and he had in his room a mass of bottles and vials, a whole pharmacy, containing all the citrates, the phosphates, the proto-carbonates, the lactates, the sulphates of protoxide, the

iodides and proto-iodides of iron, the Pearson's cordials, the Devergie solutions, Dioscoride granules, arsenate of soda and arsenate of gold pills, and wines of gentian and of quinine, of coca and of colombo!

"And to think that all that is humbug and money lost!" sighed M. Folantin, piteously regarding his vain purchases; and although he had no voice in the matter, the concierge was of the same opinion. The latter merely dusted M. Folantin's room more carelessly than ever, being conscious of a growing contempt, robust fellow that he was, for this consumptive lodger, who could only keep himself alive by swallowing huge quantities of drugs.

In the meanwhile, the existence of M. Folantin continued to be a monotonous one. He had not been able to bring himself to return to his former restaurant; he had gone, once, as far as the door, but arrived there, the smell of the grills and the sight of a pitcher of violet-colored cream for chocolate had put him to flight. He alternated the wine-shops and the *bouillons*, and once a week, he ran aground in a Provençal fish-food factory. The soup and the fish were passable, but he did not dare order anything else; the meats were as shriveled as shoe-leather, and all the dishes had the acrid taste of lamp-oil.

In order to prick up an appetite still further blunted by the abject *apéritifs* of the cafés—the absinthe stunk of copper, the vermouth was the lees of bitter white wines, the Madeira was cut in three-sixths part with burnt sugar and molasses, the Malaga was prune-

DOWN STREAM

sauce and wine and the bitters the cheapest drug-store *eau de Botot*—after all this, M. Folantin decided to try a stimulant which had proved successful in his childhood: every two days, he betook himself to the baths. This exercise pleased him, especially for the reason that, having two hours to kill between the time of leaving his office and dinner, he avoided, thus, the necessity of returning to his lodgings and sitting there, all dressed and shod and constantly consulting his watch, as he waited for the dinner hour. The first few visits, he enjoyed some delicious moments. He would squat in the warm water and amuse himself by raising tempests and hollowing out maelstroms with his fingers. He would grow gently drowsy to the silvery sound of drops of water, falling from the beaks of swans, in the form of great circles, which broke against the walls of the tub, then he would start up at the furious sound of bells in the passageway, followed by the noise of footsteps and the banging of doors. Silence once more, with the gentle plashing of watercocks, and all his distresses would flee away. In his booth, veiled with vapor, he would fall into a dream, and his thoughts, becoming opalescent with the steam, would grow weak and diffuse. At bottom, everything was for the best. He was bored, but good God! didn't every one have his troubles? He had, in any event, avoided the most grievous, the most annoying of all, those of marriage. I must have been very low that night, when I wept over my celibacy, he told himself. Picture me, who like to

DOWN STREAM

stretch out, coiled up like a trigger of a gun between the covers, forced not to budge and forced to endure contact with a woman at all times and to satisfy her, when all I want to do is, simply, to sleep!

And yet, if one did not procreate any children, or if one's wife were really sterile or very clever, that would not be half bad! But one was never sure of anything! And in the other case, there were perpetual sleepless nights, nights of incessant worry. The brat would bawl one day because he was cutting a tooth and the next day because he was unable to cut one; and the whole room would, surely, stink of milk and *pipi*. All this, supposing one at least fell in with an amiable woman, with a good girl. Ah, but go on, Jean, see if you can find them. With my usual luck, I should have married a minx or a little chippy, who would have reproached me, interminably, for the kidney trouble that followed her pregnancy.

No, one should be just: each state in life had its worries and its annoyances. And moreover, it was a base thing to do, when one had no fortune, to bring a lot of urchins into the world!—It was to consign one's offspring to the contempt of others when they grew up; it was to hurl them defenseless and unarmed into a disgusting struggle; it was to persecute and punish the innocent ones, who were thus forced to begin all over again the miserable life of their father. —“Ah! at least, the sorry race of Folantins shall become extinct with me!”—Thus consoled, M. Folantin, upon emerging from his bath, would lap up,

DOWN STREAM

uncomplainingly, his dish-water soup and slash away at his meat, which was like wet match-wood.

In one way or another, he contrived to worry through to the end of winter, when life became more tolerable. The intimacy of interiors ceased, and M. Folantin no longer regretted, in so lively a fashion, his downy fire-side naps. His strolls along the quay began again.

Already, the trees were putting forth little yellow leaves; the Seine, reflecting the dappled azure of the sky, flowed along in great blue and white patches, which struck against the fen-boats, blurring them with foam. The surrounding scenery appeared to be dressed out for the occasion. The two immense wings, one formed by the *pavillon de Flore* and the entire façade of the *Louvre*, the other by the line of tall houses all the way down to the *Palais de l'Institut*, had been freshened up and, as it were, repainted, while the backdrop, newly reared, etched in, upon a softened but quite novel ultra-marine, the sentry-boxes of the *Palais de Justice*, the spire of the *Sainte-Chapelle* and the wimble and towers of *Nôtre-Dame*.

M. Folantin adored this portion of the quay, between the rue du Bac and the rue Dauphine. He would choose a cigar in the tobacconist's shop situated near the rue de Beaume and then stroll musingly on, going one day to the left, rummaging among the parapet-boxes, and the next day to the right, consulting the rows of books on the outdoor stalls.

The majority of the volumes heaped in the bins

were book-shop cast-aways, riff-raff of no value. Some were stillborn novels, centering about women of the fashionable world, narrating, in the dialect of a janitor's wife, the accidents of tragic love, duels, assassinations and suicides. Others attempted to sustain theses, attributing all vices to titled folk and all virtues to the people. Others finally, had a religious object and stepped forth clad in the approbation of Monsignor So-and-So. These last, with ladlefuls of holy water, diluted the musilage of a sticky prose.

All these novels had been indited, unquestionably, by imbeciles, and M. Folantin ran through them quickly, not pausing for breath, until he came to the volumes of verse, which beat a wing in every breeze. These were less dog-eared and less soiled, showing, evidently, that no one had opened them. A charitable pity came to M. Folantin for these forlorn anthologies. And how many there were, how many there were! Old ones, dating from the appearance of Malekadel in literature, and young ones, sprung from the school of Hugo, singing of the gentle Messidor, shady groves and the divine charms of a young female, who, in private life was, probably, a milliner's apprentice. And all this stuff had been read at little gatherings, and the poor writers had rejoiced over it. Good Lord! they had not expected a resounding success, a popular sale, but only a few bravos on the part of the fastidious and the lettered; and nothing had come of it, not even a little esteem. Here and there, a banal bit of praise in some worthless sheet, a ridicu-

lous letter from the Great Master, piously preserved, and that had been all.

The saddest part, thought M. Folantin, is that these unfortunates may justly execrate the public, for literary justice does not exist; their verses are neither better nor worse than those which are sold, and which have carried their authors to the Institute.

Reflecting all the while on the mysteries of fate, M. Folantin would relight his cigar and recognize the shop-keepers whom, swarthy and garrulous, he would find seated, as they had been the year before, near their booths. He would recognize also the bibliomaniacs, who, in the late spring, tramp up and down the length of the parapets, and the sight of these individuals, whom he did not know, would charm him. He felt a sympathy for them all, divining in them gentle lunatics and brave and tranquil fellows, passing through life with no great fuss, and for this he envied them. If only I were like them, he would think; and he had even endeavored to imitate them by becoming a bibliophile. He had consulted catalogues and leafed through dictionaries and special publications, but he had never discovered any curiosities, and he sensed the fact, moreover, that such possessions would never fill up the gap of ennui which was gradually being hollowed out of his entire being.—Alas! the taste for books was not one to be acquired, and moreover, beyond the rare editions, which his slender resources forbade his purchasing, there were not many volumes that M. Folantin cared to procure. He loved neither

DOWN STREAM

cloak and sword romances nor tales of adventure. On the one hand, he abominated the veal-stews of the Cherbuliers and the Feuilletts; he cared only for the things of real life; and so, his library was limited, in all, to half a hundred volumes, the contents of which he knew by heart. And this scarcity of books to read was by no means one of the least of his vexations! He had striven, in vain, to become interested in history; but all its complicated explanations of simple things had failed either to captivate or to convince him. Vaguely, he ferreted about, without hope of tracking down a printed hare that he might add to his collection. But these promenades distracted him; and when he was tired of stirring up book-dust, he had but to lean over the bluffs, and the view of the boats with their tarred hulls, their cabins painted a leek-green and their main-masts lowered over their decks, was pleasing to him. He would remain there, enchanted, contemplating the ship's cook at work over a cast-iron stove in the open air, the eternal black and white dog running up and down the length of the pinnace, with its curly tail in the air, and the very blonde lads, seated near the helm, with their hair in their eyes and their fingers in their mouths.

It would be jolly to live like that, he thought, smiling, despite himself, at his puerile desires. He even envied the fishermen along the bank, sitting immobile, like rows of onions, separated from one another by boxes of bait.

On these evenings, he felt more himself and a good

DOWN STREAM

deal younger. He would consult his watch, and if the dinner hour were still distant, he would cross the causeway, follow the sidewalk opposite the one he had just left and so ascend along the front of the houses. He would lounge along, ransacking once more among the rows of books with their backs lined up against the shop-fronts, admiring the display of ancient bindings and red-morocco backs, stamped with golden coats-of-arms; but these latter were shut up under glass, as being precious things which only the initiate might touch. And then he would go on, pausing to examine the shops full of old odds-and-ends, so well repaired that they no longer showed any trace of time; plates of old Rouen manufactured at Batignolles, the great plates of Moustiers baked at Versailles, the pictures of Hobbema, including the little stream, the water-mill, and the house roofed in red tiles and fanned by a cluster of trees, the whole enveloped in a mass of yellow light. There were also pictures, astonishingly imitated, by a painter who had put on the skin of old Minderhout, but who was incapable of simulating the manner of a master or of producing, on his own account, a canvas of the slightest value. M. Folantin, with a glance of the eye through the doorways, would try to pierce the depths of these shops, but never did he see any customers there. The sole occupant was, generally, an old woman, seated, amid the pell-mell confusion of objects, in a niche which she had reserved for herself. Weary, she would open her mouth in an extended

yawn, which was communicated to the cat, perched upon a console.

It is funny all the same, reflected M. Folantin, how the bric-à-brac shopwomen differ. On the rare occasions when I have traveled through the quarters of the right bank, I have never seen, in the curio shops, good old dames like that one there, but have always perceived, behind the windows, fine, tall, buxom wenches of from thirty to forty years, carefully pomaded and with faces well powdered.

A vague odor of prostitution escaped from these shops, in which the oglings of the proprietress cut short the bargainings of buyers.—Ah, the pretty faces are gone. Moreover, the center of business is changing. All the antiquaries and venders of de luxe books are now going to seed in this quarter, and as soon as their leases expire, they flee to the other side of the river. In ten years from now, the breweries and cafés will have invaded the whole ground-level of the quay! Ah! decidedly, Paris is becoming a sinister Chicago! And, rendered very melancholy by this reflection, M. Folantin kept repeating: We ought to profit from the time that is left us before the definitive invasion of New World ugliness!—And he would resume his stroll, stopping in front of the print-shops with their displays of eighteenth century work; but basically, the colored engravings of this epoch, and those in the dark English manner which flanked them in the majority of the show-windows, did not inspire him with any particular passion, and he found himself regret-

DOWN STREAM

ting the prints of intimate Flemish life, now relegated to the boxes within, as a result of the infatuation of collectors for the French school.

When he was tired of trifling in front of the shops, he would enter, by way of varying his pleasures, the room of a newspaper where dispatches were displayed, a room adorned with drawings and paintings, depicting Italian ladies, nurse-maids and babes in arms, along with mediaeval pages scraping mandolins under balconies, an entire series evidently destined for the ornamentation of sun-shades. He would turn away and pass on, preferring to look at the photographs of assassins, generals and actresses, all those whom a crime, a massacre or a *chansonnette* had given a week's fame.

But these exhibitions were, the truth is, unamusing enough, and M. Folantin, regaining the rue de Beaune, would find more to admire in the unshakable appetites of the coachmen, seated at the tables of the *mastroquets*, and he would feel what he took to be an attack of hunger. Those platforms of beef, reposing on thick beds of cabbage, those Irish stews, filling the small but massive plate, those triangles of Brie, those overflowing glasses would give him sudden pangs in his stomach, and those fellows, their cheeks puffed out with enormous mouthfuls of bread, their great hands holding knives with points in the air, their coarse leather caps rising and falling to the tempo of their jaws, would excite him greatly. And so, he would go on, doing his best to preserve this

DOWN STREAM

impression of voracity. Unfortunately, however, no sooner was he seated in a restaurant than his palate would go back on him, and he would contemplate his food piteously, demanding of himself of what use his quassia was, pickling in a decanter at his office.

But in spite of everything, these promenades served to keep away thoughts that were too sombre; and so, he passed the summer trailing along the Seine before dinner and, as soon as he had left the table, taking his place at another at the door of a café. Here he would smoke and breathe in little fresh air, and, despite the disgust which the beers of Vienne, made with rosewort and *eau de buis* along the road to Flanders, inspired in him, he would consume a couple of bocks, having little desire to go to bed.

The day itself, during this season, was not so hard to live through. In his shirt sleeves, in his cubby-hole of an office, he would drowse away, listening, confusedly, to the stories of his colleague and awakening to fan himself with an almanach, working as little as possible and planning promenades. The annoyance which he experienced in winter of having to leave a warm office and run out of doors, to dine with drenched feet and then return home to a cold room no longer existed. On the contrary, he felt a sense of relief upon escaping from his hole, stunk up with that dusty, shut-in odor which boxes, files and ink-pots exhale.

Finally, his room was better kept; the porter no longer had to prepare a fire, and if the bed continued

DOWN STREAM

to be badly stirred and not tucked in, it made little difference, since M. Folantin was in the habit of sleeping naked upon the sheets and covers.

The thought of being able to stretch out alone, on stormy nights, when one sweats like a stove and tosses about on the tumbled sheets, rejoiced him also. I pity those who are not single, he would remark, rolling about his bed in quest of a little cooler spot. And destiny would seem to him, at such moments as these, more hospitable, less stubborn.



III

THE OVERPOWERING heat soon lessened, the long days grew shorter, the air freshened, and the piquant skies lost their blue and became shaggy as though with mould. Autumn returned, bringing with it mist and rain. M. Folantin foresaw inexorable evenings and, frightened, looked to his plans once more.

In the first place, he resolved to break off his unsociable habits, to try out the tables d'hôte, to form table acquaintances and even to frequent the theatres.

His wishes were fulfilled when, one day, upon the threshold of his office, he met a gentleman whom he knew. They had, for a whole year, eaten side by side, had warned each other against defective or spoiled dishes, had lent each other the newspaper, had discussed the virtues of the different compounds of iron which they took, had drunk tar-water together for a month, had indulged in predictions regarding changes in the weather and had formed, between them, a number of diplomatic alliances for France.

Their relations had ended there. They now indulged in a shake of the hand and turned their backs

upon each other as soon as they had reached the sidewalk. And yet, the departure of his co-religionist was saddening to M. Folantin.

It was with pleasure that the perception dawned upon him.

"Wait a minute, M. Martinet," he called out, "and how goes it anyway?"

"M. Folantin! Pshaw! And how have you been, since we saw each other last?"

"Ah! You're a fine deserter," replied M. Folantin. "What the devil has become of you?"

And they had exchanged confidences. M. Martinet was now a steady boarder at a table d'hôte, and he immediately fell into a fanciful eulogy of the place. "Ninety to a hundred francs a month. It is clean and well-kept, there is plenty to eat and the company is good. Don't you think you ought to come to dinner there?"

"I don't care much about tables d'hôte," said M. Folantin. "I am a trifle bearish, as you know; I cannot bring myself to converse with people I don't know."

"But you are not forced to talk. It is just like being in your own home. They don't all sit around one table; it's like a big restaurant. Come on, try it once; come this evening."

M. Folantin hesitated, deliberating between his decision not to eat alone and the fear inspired in him by promiscuous meals.

"Come on! You're not going to refuse," insisted M.

DOWN STREAM

Martinet. "I'll regard *you* as a deserter if, the one time I run into you, you leave me flat."

M. Folantin was afraid of being impolite, and so, docilely followed his companion through the streets.—"Here we are. Come on up."—And M. Martinet paused on the landing before a green-tambour door.

There came from within a great clatter of plates and an unbroken buzz of voices; then the door opened and, at the same moment, a violent pack of fellows with hats on their heads hurled themselves out upon the stairs, beating the balusters with their canes as they descended.

M. Folantin and his comrade stood out of the way, then pushed the door in their turn and entered a billiard-parlor. M. Folantin shrank back in terror. The room was drowned in a dense cloud of tobacco smoke, pierced by the impact of cues. M. Martinet led his guest into another room, where the reek was, if anything, even more intense. Here and there, amid songs from pipe-laden mouths, amid the tumbling of dominoes and bursts of laughter, bodies could be seen passing, almost invisible, to be divined only by the displacement of vapor which they accomplished. M. Folantin was dumfounded and groped for a chair.

M. Martinet had left him. Vaguely, in a cloud, M. Folantin perceived him coming out of a door.

"We'll have to wait a while," said M. Martinet. "All the tables are full. Oh, it won't be very long!"

A half hour glided by. M. Folantin would have given a great deal never to have set foot in this

DOWN STREAM

estaminet, where one might smoke, but where one did not eat. From time to time, M. Martinet would slip away and return to assure him that the seats were still occupied.

"There are two gentlemen who are at their cheese," he remarked, with a satisfied air. "I've reserved their places."

Another half hour went by. M. Folantin asked himself if it would not be well for him to make his way to the stair while his companion was watching the tables. Finally, M. Martinet came back and announced the departure of the two cheeses, and they made their way into a third room, where they sat down, squeezed in like herrings in a barrel.

Upon an indifferent cloth, amid sauce-splashes and bread-crumbs, their plates were tossed in front of them, and they were served with a tough and coriaceous steak, unsavory vegetables, a roast-beef so elastic it stretched under the knife, a salad and a dessert. This room reminded M. Folantin of the dining room of a *pension*, but a badly-kept *pension*, where one bawled instead of speaking at table. There was lacking, indeed, nothing but the tin cups, their bottoms rusted by long use, and the upturned plates to provide a little cleaner spot on which to set the prunes or the jam.

The food and the wine were, certainly, wretched, but what was more wretched than the food and wine was the company in which one had to munch his food. The dishes were brought in by skinny servant

DOWN STREAM

girls and dried-up females with severe and accentuated features and hostile eyes. A complete impotence came over you as you looked at them. One felt himself watched and ate stealthily and with a discouraged air, not daring to leave the shreds and skins from fear of a rebuke, afraid to take a second helping, under those eyes which gauged your hunger and drove it back to the bottom of your belly.

"Ah, ha! what did I tell you?" asserted M. Martinet. "It's jolly, don't you think? And this is real food here."

M. Folantin did not breathe a word. About him, the tables were emptying with a terrible racket.

All the races of the south filled the seats and spat and sprawled with bellowing vehemence. All the tribes of Provence, Lozere, Gascogny and Languedoc, with cheeks as black as ebony-chips, with hairy nostrils, shaggy hands and resounding voices, bawled like convicts, their accent emphasized by epileptic gestures, as they hacked to pieces the phrases of their speech and shoved them, pulverized, into your burning ears.

Nearly all were young students from the schools, a part of that glorious youth whose subaltern ideas assure the ruling classes of an immortal recruitment for their stupidities. M. Folantin beheld passing in front of him a procession of all the commonplaces, all the quibblings, all the superannuated literary opinions and all the paradoxes that had been worn by a hundred-years hard usage.

In his opinion, the minds of day-laborers were

possessed of more delicacy and those of counter-jumpers of more shrewdness than these. With all this, the heat was unendurable. A vapor covered the plates and veiled the glasses. The doors, rudely fanned, brought the exhalations of a smoking-room. Troops of students were still arriving, and their impatience was trained upon those seated at table. As in the lunchroom of a railway station, one had to take double mouthfuls and gulp down his wine at top speed.

And this is the famous table d'hôte which formerly distributed the billfuls to the little birdies of politics, reflected M. Folantin, and the thought that these fledglings now filling the room with their uproar, would become, in due turn, solemn personages, gorged with honors and preferments, startled him.

Better cram dressed pork at home and drink nothing but water, anything, except dine here, he told himself.

"Will you have coffee?" inquired M. Martinet, in an amiable tone.

"No, thanks; I'm suffocating; I'm going to take a little air."

But M. Martinet was not disposed to leave him. He rejoined him upon the landing and seized his arm.

"Where are you taking me?" said M. Folantin, utterly discouraged.

"Look here, my dear fellow," replied M. Martinet. "I can see that my table d'hôte doesn't please you greatly—"

DOWN STREAM

"But yes . . . but yes . . . for the price, it is even surprising . . . only, it's very warm," timidly replied M. Folantin, who feared he had wounded his host by his scowling manner and his flight.

"Oh, well, we don't see each other often enough for me to be able to afford to let you leave me with a bad impression," said M. Martinet, in a cordial tone. "By the way, how are we going to kill the evening? If you liked the theatre, I should propose that we go to the Opéra-Comique.—We have time," he added, examining his watch. "They are playing *Richard Coeur-de-Lion* this evening and the *Pré-aux-Clercs*. Eh, what do you say to that?"

"Whatever you say."

After all, thought M. Folantin, I may succeed in distracting myself, and besides, how can I refuse this good fellow's proposal, when I have already dashed all his enthusiasms.

"Will you permit me to offer you a cigar?" he said, entering a tobacconist's shop.

They exhausted themselves in the vain attempt to promote the combustion of these Londres, which tasted like cabbage and would not draw.

"Another pleasure gone to hell," M. Folantin remarked to himself. "Even by paying the price, one can no longer procure a decent cigar!"

"We'd better give it up," he continued, turning to M. Martinet, who was puffing with all his might on his Londoner, the wrapper of which burst, smoking

DOWN STREAM

a bit. "And besides, we're there." And he ran to the wicket and brought back two orchestra seats.

Richard was opening, to an empty house.

M. Folantin experienced, during the first act, a strange impression. This series of songs for spinets reminded him of the music-box in a wine-shop he sometimes had frequented. When the working-class customers turned the handle, a medley of aging airs would sound forth, very soft and slow, with, from time to time, a few sharp and crystalline notes leaping out above the mechanical tapping of the *ritournelles*.

In the second act, another impression came to him. The air, *Une fièvre brulante*, invoked in his mind an image of his grandmother, who had quavered it to him on the Utrecht velvet of her easy-chair; and he tasted in his mouth, for a second, the biscuits which she had given him, when still a lad, for having been a good boy.

He ended by failing to follow the piece, at all. Moreover, the singers had no voices, and so, limited themselves to stretching round mouths over the foot-lights, while the orchestra went to sleep, tired of dusting out such music as this.

Then, in the third act, M. Folantin thought no more of the music-box in the wine-shop nor of his grandmother, but perceived suddenly, in his nose, the odor of an antique box that he had at home, an odor musty and vague, like that of mold on cinnamon-bark. Good Lord! How stale it all was!

DOWN STREAM

"Pretty comic opera, isn't it?" said M. Martinet, giving him a dig with the elbow.

M. Folantin fell from the heights. The spell was broken. They arose as the curtain dropped, saluted by a volley from the claque.

The *Pré-aux-Clercs*, which succeeded *Richard*, completed M. Folantin's demolition. There was a time when he would have swooned with joy at familiar airs, but now all these ballads impressed him as troubadourish and demoted, while their interpreters irritated him. The tenor had the sage presence of a *frotteur* and sang through his nose when, by chance, a small strand of sound emerged, at all. Costumes, scenery, all was in keeping; the company would have been hissed in any city, abroad or in the provinces, for nowhere else would the public have endured a singer so ridiculous or cantatrices so baroque. Yet the house, by this time, had filled, while the audience was applauding the passages underscored by the implacable claque.

M. Folantin was really suffering. Here, the *Pré-aux-Clercs*, of which he had preserved a pleasant memory, was breaking down also.

"All gone to the bow-wows," and he heaved a hugh sigh.

And so, when M. Martinet, enchanted with his evening, proposed to renew, from time to time, these little parties, and that they should go together, if he liked, to the *Français*, M. Folantin became indignant and, forgetting the reserve which he had prom-

ised himself to observe, declared violently that he would never set foot in the theatre again.

"But why?" queried M. Martinet.

"Why? In the first place, for the reason that if there were such a thing as a lively and well written play,—and I, for my part, have never known one—I should read it at home, in an easy chair, and in the second place, because I have no need to listen to these, for the most part, untrained block-heads in their efforts to translate for me the thoughts of Monsieur the author, who has laid upon them the task of retailing his merchandise."

"But surely," said M. Martinet, "you will admit that the comedians of the *Théâtre-Français*—"

"They!" exclaimed M. Folantin. "Go on! They are Vatels of the *Palais-Royal*; they are sauce-makers, and that's all!—They are good for nothing except to smear over the portions that are brought to them, with their immutable white sauce, if it's a comedy, with their eternal red sauce, if it's a drama. They are incapable of inventing a third sauce; moreover, tradition would not permit it."

"Ah, they are the vulgar slaves of routine, those fellows! Only, to do them justice, they do understand publicity, for they have borrowed from the big haberdashers the ornamental gentleman who keeps himself very much in view, and who enhances by his presence the prestige of the house and draws custom to it."

"Oh, come, M. Folantin—"

"There is no 'come'; it is just as I have said.

DOWN STREAM

And to tell you the truth, I'm not sorry to have had the opportunity to express my opinion of M. Coquelin's shop,—And with this, my dear sir, I have reached my destination. I am charmed with our meeting. See you soon again, I hope."

The consequences of this evening were salutary. Remembering the fatigue and boredom he had experienced, M. Folantin felt satisfied to dine where it seemed good to him and to remain for a whole evening in his room. He decided that solitude had its good qualities and that to ruminate on his memories and talk nonsense to himself was preferable to the company of those whose convictions and sympathies he did not share. His desire to approach and rub elbows with his neighbor ceased, and for yet another time, he repeated to himself this desolating verity: that when old friends have disappeared, one should make up one's mind not to seek new ones, but to live a quiet life and become used to solitude.

Then he endeavored to concentrate, to take an interest in little things and to draw consoling deductions from the lives he remarked about him at table. He went to dine, for a certain time, in a little *bouillon* near the Croix Rouge. This establishment was generally frequented by the aged, by old dames who came there each day at a quarter of six, and the tranquillity of the little room recompensed him for the monotony of the bill-of-fare. One would have said that these were folk without family, without friends, seeking only dark and silent corners to dis-

patch some duty laid upon them; and M. Folantin found himself more at his ease in this world of the disinherited, peopled with persons polite and discreet, who undoubtedly had known better days and evenings better filled. He knew them nearly all at sight, and he felt certain affinities with these transients, who hesitated over the choice of a dish, who crumbled their bread and barely drank at all, to the breakdown of their stomachs being added the dolorous lassitude of an existence prolonged without object and without hope.

Here were no noisy summonings of the waiter, no bawlings. The waitresses held consultations with the customers in a low voice. But if none of these ladies, none of these gentlemen exchanged a remark, all, at least, saluted each other, graciously, upon entering and leaving, bringing the manners of the salon into the pot-house.

I am a little happier than all these, thought M. Folantin. They, perhaps, are regretting children, wives, a fortune lost, a life that yesterday was promising and today is prostrate.

From pitying others, he ended by pitying himself less; and so, he would return home and reflect that his distresses were quite hollow and his miseries shallow enough.—How many persons at this very hour are pacing the street without a lodging? How many would envy my big easy-chair, my fire, my package of tobacco, from which I can draw at my fancy! And he stirred up the flames in the grate,

DOWN STREAM

toasted his slippers and proceeded to manufacture a hot and golden punch.—If bookstores had books that were truly artistic, life would be, in short, quite endurable, he concluded.

A number of weeks glided by in this manner, and his colleague at the office declared that M. Folantin was becoming young again. He conversed now, listened with an angelic patience to all gabblings and even took an interest in the infirmities of his fellow workman. In addition, with the beginning of cold weather, his appetite was more regular, and he attributed this amelioration to the wines of creosote and the preparations of manganese which he absorbed.—I have at last found a medicine that is less treacherous and more effective than the others, he thought. And he recommended it to all persons whom he met.

Winter thus came on; but at the first snowfall, his melancholy reappeared. The *bouillon* at which he had been eating since autumn wearied him, and he began once more browsing around fortuitously, sometimes here and sometimes there. On several occasions, he crossed the bridges and tried new restaurants; but, in a rush, the *garçons* would cut out, would fail to answer one's summons, or else they would hurl down your plate and flee when you asked for more bread.

The food was not superior to that on the left bank, and the service was arrogant and impudent. M. Folantin took this for granted, from then on, and remained in his own *arrondissement*, resolved not to stir out of it again.

DOWN STREAM

His lack of appetite came back to him. He recognized, once more, the futility of stomachics and stimulants, and the remedies he had so cried up went to join the others in a cupboard.

What to do? The weeks dripped by once more, but it was the Sundays that weighed heaviest upon him.

Formerly, he had sauntered through deserted quarters; it pleased him to walk along forgotten lanes, the poor and provincial streets, with the object of surprising, at the ground-floor windows, the mysteries of little households. But today, the calm and silent streets were demolished; the curious passage-ways had been razed. It was impossible now to look through the half-open doors of old houses and to catch a glimpse of a little garden-end, the curb of a well or a corner bench, impossible to tell one's self that life might be less glum, less overbearing in that court-yard, while one dreamed of the time when one might retire to such a spot of silence and rewarm his old age in a milder atmosphere.

All this had disappeared. No more massive foliage, no more trees; but instead, as far as the eye could reach, interminable barracks. And M. Folantin suffered, in this new Paris, an impression of uneasiness and anguish.

He was a man who detested sumptuous shops, whom nothing in the world could have led to set foot in an elegant barber-shop or in one of those modern groceries the windows of which flared with gas; he loved only ancient and simple shops, where one was

DOWN STREAM

greeted with sincerity, and where the shopkeeper did not try to throw dust in your eyes or humiliate you, through a show of his own good fortune.

And so he had renounced, of a Sunday, his habit of walking amid all this luxury of bad taste which had invaded even the suburbs. Besides, strolls in Paris no longer served him as a tonic, as they once had done; he only felt the more puny, petty, hopelessly lost and alone, in the midst of these tall houses, with marble vestibules and insolent concierge-lodges, which advertised the allurements of bourgeois salons.

One portion of his quarter, however, had remained intact, near the mutilated Luxembourg; the place Saint-Sulpice was still, for him, an intimate blessing.

Sometimes, he would breakfast at a wine merchant's whose shop was at the corner of the rue du Vieux-Colombier and the rue Bonaparte. Here, seated at a window on the *entresol*, he would plunge into the life of the square, contemplate the departure of the congregation from mass, the children descending from the churchyard, prayer-books in hand, a little in front of their fathers and mothers, and the crowd gathered about a fountain, decorated with bishops seated in niches and with lions crouched above a basin.

By leaning slightly forward over the balustrade, he could see the corner of the rue Saint-Sulpice, a terrible corner, swept by the wind from up the rue Ferou and occupied, likewise, by a wine-merchant, who drew the thirsty custom of the preceptors. This portion of

DOWN STREAM

the square interested him, with its view of people, hat in hand, swaying upon their feet in the storm, near the big omnibuses of La Villette, the large red-brown bodies of which were drawn up on a level with the sidewalk in front of the church.

The place was animated, but without gayety or bustle. The fiacres slept at their stand, in front of a five-centimes *cabinet* and a *trinckball*. The enormous yellow Batignolles omnibuses flashed, tossing, through the streets, crossed in their path by the little green omnibus of the Panthéon and by the pale-colored two-horse coach of Auteuil. At noon, the seminarists filed out, two by two, with lowered eyes and the mechanical step of automatons, unrolling a long black and white band from Saint-Sulpice to the seminary.

Under a ray of sunlight, the square became charming. The uneven towers of the church grew light, the gold of street-signs sparkled with announcements of sales of chasubles and holy ciboriums, and the colors in a furniture-mover's vast picture brightened and blazed more harshly, while upon the casing of a urinal was a dyer's advertisement, consisting of two scarlet hats, springing up against a black background, an appeal being made, in this quarter populated with beadles and the pious, to the pomps of religion and the word of high dignitaries of the priesthood.

The only thing was, this spectacle provided M. Folantin with no surprise. How many times, in his youth, had he tramped through this square to see the

DOWN STREAM

old wild boar which formerly occupied the maison Baily? How many times, of an evening, had he listened to the lament of some singer, in the open air, near the fountain? How many times had he strolled, on flower-market days, near the seminary?

He had exhausted, a long while since, the charm of this tranquil place. If he was to be able to savor it anew, he would have to space his visits and come there only at rare intervals.

Thus, the place Saint-Sulpice was no longer a refuge for him on Sunday; and it is no wonder if he preferred the other days of the week, for, going to his office, he had less time on his hands. Ah! Sunday had certainly become an interminable day! On this particular morning, he was breakfasting a little later than usual and spending a small eternity at table, in order to leave the porter time to clean his room, for it was never in order when he returned. He always had to stumble over the rolled-up rugs and to make his way through a cloud raised by the broom. Once or twice, the fellow had turned back the bed-clothes, stretched out the rug and departed, under pretext that he did not wish to put Monsieur out.

M. Folantin would scrape the dust from the furniture with his fingers, would arrange his clothes, piled upon a chair, would give a stroke with the feather duster here and there and place fresh ashes in his cuspidor. Then he would count the linen which the laundress sometimes brought back; and so great a disgust would assail him at sight of the rents in his shirts

DOWN STREAM

that he would stick them away in a drawer, without examining them further.

The day was easily spent, up to four o'clock. He would reread old letters of relatives and friends long dead and leaf through his books, tasting a few passages. But about five o'clock, he commenced to suffer ; the moment for dressing would then approach, and the very thought of bestirring himself out of doors would quench his hunger and, on certain Sundays, he would not budge out—or if he found, later, that he had a tardy appetite, he would descend in slippers feet and get a couple of small loaves of bread, pastry or some sardines. He had always a little chocolate and some wine in a wall-cupboard, and he would make a meal, happy in being at home and in being able to stretch out with plenty of elbow-room, avoiding, for once, the close quarters of a restaurant. Only, the night was a bad time. He would awake with a start, with twinges and shudders. Sometimes his insomnia would last an hour, and, the darkness giving new life to all his melancholy ideas, he would repeat, over and over again, all the lamentations of the day, until he came to regret the fact that he had not taken a concubine.—Ah! if I had had, in my youth, a mistress, and if I had kept her, I should be able to end my years with her, and I should find, upon my return home, my lamp lighted and my dinner ready. If I had my life to live over again, I would do differently ! I would take a wife for my old days. I have, undoubtedly, presumed too much on my strength, and now, I am at

the end of it.—And the next morning, he would get up with legs black and blue and a head numbed and sluggish.

The times were, otherwise, hard for him. The winter had become severe, and the cold north wind rendered home an enviable place and made odious the abodes of traitors who were constantly opening their doors. All of a sudden, a great hope upset M. Folantin. One morning, in the rue de Grenelle, he discovered a new *pâtisserie*, which had just been installed. The following inscription flamed, in brass letters, upon the pane : “*Diners pour la ville*”.

M. Folantin was dazzled. Could it be that the dream he had so long harbored, of having his dinners sent in to him, was about to be realized at last ?—But he became discouraged upon recalling his futile quest, in the quarter, of an establishment which would consent to send out meals.

It costs nothing to ask, he decided, and entered.

“But certainly, Monsieur”, replied a young lady, entrenched behind a counter and with a bust surrounded by Saint Honores and tarts. “Nothing is easier, since you only live a few steps from here. And at what time would you like us to send it ?”

“At six o’clock”, said M. Folantin, trembling all over.

“*Parfaitement.*”

A shadow crossed M. Folantin’s brow.

“Well, then,” replied M. Folantin, stammering a

DOWN STREAM

little, "I should like a soup, a plate of meat and a vegetable. What will be the price?"

The lady appeared to be absorbed in her reflections and murmured, with eyes on the ceiling: "Soup. . . . meat vegetable.—You don't take wine?"

"No, I have it at home."

"Ah, then, Monsieur, under those conditions, it will be two francs."

M. Folantin's face lighted.

"All right," he said, "it's a bargain. And when can we commence?"

"Why, whenever you please. This evening, if you like."

"This evening, Madame."—And he bowed, and received in return an inclination so profound, from behind the counter, that the lady's nose came near hollowing out the Saint-Honores and making a hole in the tarts.

In the street, M. Folantin, after a few steps, came to a standstill. "Well, that's that! It's a chance." Then his joy moderated. "Let's hope that fodder is at least middling. Pooh! I've endured, in my poor life, so many execrable dishes that I haven't the right to be sticklish.—She's nice, that young lady," he went on. "It's not that she's pretty, but she had very expressive eyes. If only she's a good business woman."

And as he resumed his dog-trot, he wished the *pâtissière* prosperity.

Then he set about devising plans to avoid the confusion of the first night. He ordered, at the grocer's,

DOWN STREAM

six litres of wine. Then, when he reached his office, he drew up a small list of purchases he was to make :

Jam ;
Cheese ;
Biscuits ;
Salt ;
Pepper ;
Mustard ;
Vinegar ;
Oil.

"I will have bread sent up every day by my concierge. Ah, *sapristi* ! if this only succeeds, I'm saved !"

He sighed for the end of the day, and his haste to enjoy his prospective and solitary contentment retarded the flight of the hours.

He consulted his watch from time to time.

His colleague, already stupified by the ecstatic air of M. Folantin, as the latter dreamed of his ménage, smiled.

"Own up to it ; she's waiting for you," he said.

"What do you mean, she ?" queried M. Folantin, in great astonishment.

"Come on, that's all right. You're trying to teach an old monkey to make faces. Look here, all joking aside, is she blonde or brunette ?"

"Oh !" replied M. Folantin, "my friend, I can assure you that I really have something to think about besides women."

"Yes, yes. . . . I know all that. That goes without

saying. Ah, ha ! you rascal, you're still a warm baby, aren't you?"

"Look here, gentlemen. Copy this right away. I must have these two letters for signature this evening." And the boss entered and disappeared.

"It is absurd. There are four packed pages," groaned M. Folantin. "I shan't be through before five o'clock.—Good Lord, how stupid !" he added, addressing his colleague, who chuckled as he muttered : "Well, my dear fellow, but the government can't bother with these details."

In one fashion or another, fuming all the while, he ended his task, then returned home the shortest way, his arms laden with packages and his pockets crammed with sacks. Once shut in, he breathed freely, put on his house-socks, gave a slap of the napkin to the few dishes he possessed, dried his glasses and, finding neither board nor sandstone for polishing the blades of his knives, he plunged them into the earth of an old flower-pot, and so, made them shine a little.

"*Ouf !*" he exclaimed, approaching his fireside-table, "I'm ready."

Six o'clock struck.

M. Folantin awaited the baker's boy with impatience. There was in him a little of the same fever which, in his youth, had prevented him from standing still when a friend was belated or unpunctual in keeping an appointment.

Finally, at a quarter after six, the bell jangled, and a young scamp came in with his nose in the air, laden

DOWN STREAM

down with the weight of a great white-iron box in the form of a bucket. M. Folantin assisted him in placing the dishes upon the table, uncovering them after he had been left alone. There was a tapioca soup, a braised veal and cauliflower with white sauce.

"Why, this is not bad," he remarked, tasting each of the dishes. He crammed himself, with a good appetite, drank a little more than was his custom, then fell into a gentle revery as he contemplated his room.

For years, he had been intending to decorate it, but he had always told himself : "Bah ! what's the use ? I don't live at home. If, later, I am able to arrange some other sort of existence, I will fix up my place." But while buying nothing, he had, already, set his heart upon a number of trinkets, which he had ogled covetously while wandering on the quays or in the rue de Rennes.

The idea of adorning the chilly walls of his room suddenly took root in him, while tossing off one last glass. His indecision vanished. He determined to dispense the few sous he had been hoarding for years with this object in view, and he spent a charming evening in planning the appareling of his retreat. "I'll get up early in the morning," he concluded, and make the rounds, the first thing, of the novelty and bric-à-brac shops.

His listlessness was at an end. A new interest took hold of him. The business of discovering, without too great an outlay of money, a few engravings, a little crockery, kept him going. After office hours, he dis-

played a feverish haste, and climbed the stairs of the Bon Marché and the Petit Saint-Thomas, rummaging through piles of material, finding them too dark or too light, too narrow or too wide, refusing the remnants and the odds and ends which the counter-jumpers did their best to get rid of, forcing them to show him their reserve stock. By plaguing them and keeping them breathless, for hours at a time, he finally succeeded in having himself shown curtains that were ready made and rugs that were seductive to the view.

After these purchases, and after ferocious discussions with the curio and print merchants, he found himself without a sou. All his savings were exhausted, but like a child that has just been presented with new toys, M. Folantin examined and fondled his bargains in every possible way. He climbed on chairs to hang up the pictures, and he arranged his books in another order. It's good to be at home, he thought, and as a matter of fact, his room was no longer recognizable. In place of a wallpaper frayed with ancient nail-holes, the partitions disappeared under the engravings of Ostade, Teniers and all the real-life-painters of whom he was so fond. A collector would certainly have shrugged his shoulders in the presence of these prints without any margin, but M. Folantin was neither rich nor a connoisseur. He had acquired, especially, the subjects that pleased him by their relation to humble life, and he did not give a hang for the authenticity of his old plates, so long as the colors were effective and adapted to brightening up his walls.

DOWN STREAM

"I really ought also to change this furniture for mahogany," and he considered his ship's bunk, his two red-damask *voltaires*, his wash-stand of cleft marble and his table of reddish metal, "but that would be too dear, and besides, the curtains and the rugs freshen up this old furniture sufficiently, which, just like my old clothes, is made for my habits."

And now what an eagerness to get home, to light up and sink into the depths of his easy-chair! The cold seemed to him to be penned out of doors, repulsed by the intimacy of his cocky little den, and the falling snow, which deadened all the noises of the street, added still further to his sense of well-being. Dinner, in the silence of the evening, with his feet before the fire, while the plates warmed in front of the grate, with the biting wine nearby—dinner was charming, and the worries of the office, the sadness of a celibate's life, took wings and flew away in this atmosphere of pacifying stillness.

Surely, eight days had not gone by, and already, the *pâtissière* was letting up. The unvarying tapioca was full of clots, and the soup was manufactured by some chemical process. The meat-sauce stunk of bitter restaurant Madeira and all the dishes had a peculiar taste, an indefinable one, something between glue-paste, pricked up a bit, and a flat and warmish vinegar. M. Folantin vigorously peppered his meat and doctored his sauces with mustard. No use! It's all the same, he exclaimed. Everything is wrong, so far as this grub is concerned!

But the bad quality of the dishes was not to remain stationary; little by little, it began to speed up, aggravated by constant delays on the part of the little baker's boy. He would arrive at seven o'clock, covered with snow, his plate-warmer extinguished, with a pair of black eyes and scratches all down his cheeks. There was no doubt, in M. Folantin's mind, that the boy had deposited his box beside a post and had engaged in a free-for-all with other urchins of his age. He observed as much, gently, whereupon the ragamuffin began to whimper, and, holding up his hands and spitting lustily, one foot in front of another, he swore that he had done nothing of the sort and went on in such a fashion that M. Folantin, seized with pity, kept still, not daring to complain to the *pâtissière*, from fear of ruining the lad's future.

For another month, he bore valiantly all these vexations. And yet, his heart failed him when he had to pick his meat out of the white-iron box, where it had spilled; for there were days when, it seemed, a tempest had broken loose in that box, and everything was topsy-turvy, the white sauce being mingled with the tapioca, in which the braised veal had been engulfed.

There was, happily, a time of respite. The little *pâtissière* had been discharged, upon the complaint, no doubt, of less indulgent persons. His successor was a tall booby, a pale-faced dolt with big red hands. He was prompt and arrived precisely at six, but his filthy appearance was repulsive. He was clad in kitchen-clouts, stiff with grease and dirt, his cheeks were

smeared with flour and soot, and his nose, badly wiped, trickled down in two green trenches all along his mouth.

M. Folantin adopted energetic measures to meet this new turn of affairs. He foreswore sauces and soiled dishes and transferred his meat to a plate of his own, scraped it off, cleaned it and ate it with salt.

Despite his resignation, the moment would come when certain dishes gave him nausea. He was tasting now all the miss-fire meat-pies, all the pastries that had been burnt or spoiled by the embers; he was fishing up stale pellets of fruit from all his dishes. And then, hardened by his forbearance, the *pâtissière* threw all shame to the winds and began sending in all the refuse of his kitchen.

The old poisoner! muttered M. Folantin, in front of the shop of the *pâtissière* whom he no longer thought so nice, and as he regarded her stealthily, he no longer wished her a prosperous custom.

He had recourse to hard-boiled eggs. He bought them each day, not doubting that he would have that evening an impossible dinner.—And daily, he stuffed himself with salads. But the eggs were rotten. The green-grocer, as an honest man, unaware of the quality of his merchandise, sold him the worst he had in the shop.

Wait for spring, M. Folantin consoled himself, and things will take a turn; but from week to week, his energy failed him, while his body, deplorably nourished, cried out with famine. His gayety foundered;

DOWN STREAM

his room grew gloomy; a cortège of ancient distresses encompassed anew his listless existence.

"If I only had some one passion, if I loved women, the office, if I loved the café, dominoes, cards, I might blow out once in a while," he ruminated, "for I should certainly never stay at home. But alas! nothing diverts me, nothing interests me; and now, my stomach is gone! Ah! one shouldn't say it, but those who have in their pockets the money to buy food and yet cannot eat, from want of appetite, are as much to be pitied as the poor wretches who haven't a sou to appease their hunger!"



IV



ONE EVENING, while he was dallying over some eggs that smelled like fizzles, the concierge presented him with a circular letter, couched as follows: *The religious of the Congregation of St. Agatha implore you very humbly to recommend to God, in your prayers and at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the soul of their dearly beloved sister, Ursule-Aurélie Bougeard, a religious of the choir, deceased the 7th September, 1880, in the sixty-second year of her age and the thirty-fifth of her religious profession, fortified with the Sacraments of Our Holy Mother Church.*

De profundis!

Gentle heart of Mary, be my salvation.

(300 days ind.)

It was a cousin of his, whom he had last seen in his childhood; never, since the age of twenty, had he thought of her, and yet, the death of this woman was a great blow to him. She was his last relative, and he felt more abandoned than ever, since her decease in the depths of a province. He envied her calm and silent life, and he regretted the faith which he had

lost. What a fine occupation was prayer, what a pastime confession, what an outlet in the practices of religion!—"Of an evening, one goes to church, one sinks himself in contemplation, and the miseries of life are very little. Then, the Sundays flow by in the lengthy offices and in the languishment of canticles and vespers, for spleen has no sway in pious souls. Yes, but why is this consoling religion only made for the poor in spirit? Why has the church seen fit to erect into dogmas the most absurd beliefs. It is true that if one had the faith . . . yes, but I have it no longer; in short, the intolerance of the clergy repels it. And yet," he resumed, "religion alone might heal the wound that is dragging me down.—All the same, it is wrong to demonstrate to the faithful the inanity of the things they worship, for they are happy who can accept, as a transient trial, all the misfortunes, all the sufferings, all the afflictions of this present life.—Ah! Aunt Ursule must have died without regrets, persuaded that infinite joys were about to dawn for her."

He thought of her and sought to recall her features, but his memory had preserved no trace of them. Then, in order to come a little closer to her, to immerse himself a little in the existence which she had led, he reread that mysterious and penetrating chapter of the *Miserables* on the convent of Petit-Picpus.

Good heavens! it was paying dearly for the improbable happiness of a future life, he thought. The convent appeared to him a house of detention, a place of desolation and of terror. "Ah, well, none of that! I

DOWN STREAM

don't envy the fate of Aunt Ursule, any more." It made no difference; the misfortunes of one did not console those of another. And as he waited, he reflected that the fodder of the *pâtissière* had become unapproachable.

Two days later, he received another cold souse, full on the cranium.

In order to introduce a little variety into dinners composed of salads and desserts, he returned to a restaurant. There was no one there, but the service was slow, and the wine smelled of benzine.

"At least, one's not jostled here; that's something," remarked M. Folantin, by way of consolation.

The door opened, and a bellows fanned his back. He heard a great rustling of petticoats, and a shadow fell across his table. A woman stood in front of him, pulling out the chair on the rounds of which he was resting his feet. She sat down and deposited her veil and gloves beside his glass.

"What the devil ails her," he grumbled. "It would be no trouble for her to choose another; all the tables are empty; and here she has to come and install herself at mine!"

Mechanically, he raised his eyes, which he had striven to keep fixed upon his plate; he could not refrain from inspecting his neighbor. She had the figure of a little ape with a mouth that was rather large, under a pug nose, and with little black mustaches at the corners of her lips. Despite her waggish airs, she still appeared polite and reserved.

She darted him, from time to time, a glance of the eye and, in a very tender voice, implored him to pass the water-bottle or the bread. In spite of his timidity, M. Folantin was forced to reply to some of the questions she put to him. Little by little, the conversation started, and by the time dessert was reached, they were deploring, for want of something better to say, the bitter breeze that was whistling outside and gliding in under the door to freeze their legs.

"This is the kind of weather when it's not good to sleep alone," remarked the woman, in a dreamy tone.

This reflection dumfounded M. Folantin, who felt that no reply was to be expected of him.

"Is it not so, Monsieur?" she persisted.

"My God! . . . Mademoiselle . . ." and, like a poltroon who lays down his arms in order to avoid a conflict with his adversary, M. Folantin avowed his continence, the paucity of his needs, his desire for carnal tranquillity.

"Yes!" she said, looking him straight in the eyes.

He was troubled, all the more so for the reason that her corsage, which she brought close to him, exhaled an odor of amber and new-mown hay.

"I am no longer twenty years old, and upon my faith, I no longer make any pretensions—if I ever made any; it is not a thing for a man of my age to do." And he drew attention to his bald head, his livid complexion, and his clothes which no longer belonged to any mode.

"Stop that; you're joking; you're trying to make

DOWN STREAM

yourself out older than you are." And she added that she had never cared for young fellows, but preferred mature men, because the latter knew how to treat a woman.

"Undoubtedly . . . undoubtedly," stammered M. Folantin, as he asked for the check. The woman did not reach for her purse, and he understood that it was up to him to do the honors. He paid the grinning *garçon* the price of two dinners and was prepared to say goodnight to the woman, upon the threshold of the door, when she calmly took his arm.

"You're going to take me with you, Monsieur, yes?"

He sought a means of escape, excuses which would enable him to evade this unwelcome snare; but only grew perplexed, and so, weakened, under the eyes of the woman, whose perfume was bathing his temples.

"I can't do it," he ended by replying. "They do not allow women to be brought in where I live."

"Then, come with me," and she pressed her body against his and chattered on, asserting that she had a good fire in her room. —Perceiving M. Folantin's mournful attitude, she sighed: "So, I'm not good enough for you?"

"Oh, yes, Madame . . . why, yes . . . only, one may find a woman charming and still not . . ."

She burst into a laugh.

"Isn't he funny!" she said, and kissed him.

M. Folantin was ashamed of this kiss, in the open street. He had a sense of the grotesque, which framed

for him a picture of a lame old man being fondled publicly by a prostitute. He stretched his legs, in a desire to escape her caresses, fearing, at the same time, in case he endeavored to flee, a ridiculous scene that would arouse the neighborhood.

"Here we are," she said, pushing him forward slightly and walking behind him to bar his retreat. He mounted the stairs to the third floor, but contrary to the woman's assertion, he beheld no lighted fire in her room.

He regarded, very sheepishly, this room, the walls of which appeared to tremble at the vacillating gleam of a candle: a room with furniture covered in blue worsted and with a divan of Algerian upholstery. A muddy boot was thrown under a chair, and a pair of kitchen-tongs looked out at him from under a table. Here and there, advertisements of semolina-merchants and chaste chromos, representing babies besmeared with soup, were fastened to the wall with pins. On the false marble of the chimney-piece were spread out, beside an alarm-clock and a drinking glass that had been used, a quantity of pomade on a playing card, some tobacco and a few strands of hair in a newspaper.

"Make yourself at home," said the woman, and despite his refusal to undress, she seized the sleeves of his overcoat and relieved him of his hat.

"J. F. I'll bet your name is Jules," she said, looking at the letters in the lining.

He confessed that his name was Jean.

DOWN STREAM

"That's not a bad name. Come on!" and she forced him to take a seat upon a sofa and leaped upon his knees.

"Come on, dearie, what are you going to give me for my *petits gants*?"

M. Folantin sorrowfully fetched out a hundred-sou piece from his pocket, and she at once made it disappear.

"You might give me another one. I'm going to undress, and you'll see how nice I am."

M. Folantin yielded, while declaring that he preferred her not nude. And then, she caressed him so cleverly that a whiff of his youth came back, and he forgot his resolutions and lost his head. As he hesitated for a moment, doing his best all the while,—

"Don't bother about me," she said, "don't bother about me do it yourself."*

.....

M. Folantin descended from this woman's place profoundly disheartened, and all the way to his domicile, he took in, with a glance of the eye, the desolated horizon of his life. He understood, now, the futility of attempting to change one's path and the sterility of impulses and of effort. There was nothing to do but permit one's self to glide down stream. Schopenhauer, he reflected, was right. "The life of man oscillates, like a pendulum, between sorrow and

* The Asterisks occur here in the original.

DOWN STREAM

boredom." And so, it was not worth the pain to try to accelerate or to retard the sway of the pendulum. There was nothing to do but to fold one's arms and attempt to sleep. I have come to grief through having endeavored to renew the exploits of my past, from having wanted to go to the theatre, to smoke a good cigar, swallow bracers and go see a woman. I have come to grief through having quit a poor restaurant to run to one that was fully as bad, and all this only to find myself stranded in the dirty puff-pastes of a *pâtisserie*!

While reasoning in this manner, he had arrived at his house. Wait a minute, I have no matches, he remembered, digging into his pockets on the stairs. He entered his room, a breath of cold air froze his face, and as he walked forward in the darkness, he sighed: The simplest thing is to go back once more to the old pot-house, to go back tomorrow to that frightful sheep-pen. But what's the difference? There's no doubt of it: the best does not exist for fellows without a sou; only the worst ever happens.

A DISH OF SPICES

Le Drageoir aux Épices



TO OLD FRIENDS
I Tender
THIS FANTASTIC COMFIT-DISH
and these
SLENDER TRIFLES
and
GEWGAWS

PREFATORY SONNET

DOWN STREAM

PREFATORY SONNET

MUSIC-HALL sketches and a barroom-ball;
 Queen Marguerite, a purpling cameo;
 And gutter-Naiads with their smiles of woe,
Drowning old sorrows in beer-glasses tall;

Wine-shops with ivy and vine-branch over all;
 The poet Villon, in dungeon far below;
 My torment sweet and a red herring or so;
Peasant amours, where rustic breezes call;

Such are the subjects I have treated here:
 Your choice of bric-à-brac, medallions dear,
 Enamels, pastels, an eau-forte or a print,

Big-eyed idols, whose charms hold much deceit,
 Or old Brauwer's yokels, carousing without stint;
 Which will you have? The price is very neat.

A DISH OF SPICES

JAPANESE ROCOCO

O YOU of the black eyes, the black tresses, the blonde flesh, hear me, O my wanton she-wolf!

I love your fantastic eyes, those eyes that slink back under your temples; I love your mouth, red as a sorb-tree berry, your cheeks round and yellow; I love your crooked feet, your rigid throat, your large lanceolate nails, brilliant as valves of mother-of-pearl.

I love, O pretty she-wolf, your enervating non-chalance, your languishing smile, your indolent attitudes, your gestures quaint.

I love, O cajoling she-wolf, the miaulings of your voice; I love your ululating and raucous tones; but I love above all, I could die of love for, your nose, your little nose, which escapes from the folds of your loosened hair like a yellow rose blowing in black foliage.

DOWN STREAM

REPEATED THEME

HER LATE husband had crushed her with blows, had given her three youngsters and had died, reeking with absinthe.

Ever since, she has floundered in the gutter, pushing a cart and bawling, at the top of her voice: "Here you are! Here you are!"

She is ineffably ugly. She is a monster. On the neck of a prize-fighter pirouettes a face that is red, grimacing, inlaid with two blood-shot eyes and dented by a nose the two large flaps of which, store-houses for snuff, pullulate with little violaceous bulbs.

They have some appetite, those three youngsters. It is for them that she flounders in the gutter, pushing a cart and bawling, at the top of her voice: "Here you are! Here you are!"

A neighbor-woman happens to die.

Her late husband had crushed her with blows, had given her three youngsters and had died, reeking with absinthe.

The monster does not hesitate to take them in.

They have some appetite, those six youngsters! Get busy! Get busy! Without truce, without intermission, she flounders in the gutter, pushing a cart and bawling, at the top of her voice: "Here you are! Here you are!"

A DISH OF SPICES

RED CAMEO

THE ROOM was spread with rose satin, embossed with crimson flowers. The curtains fell in profusion from the windows, breaking upon a purple-flowered rug their great folds of garnet-red velvet. From the walls were suspended some red chalks of Boucher and a few round copper plates, adorned and inlaid by an artist of the Renaissance.

The divan and chairs were covered with a material to match the hangings, with carnation fringes, while upon the chimney-piece, which was surmounted by a glass without foil, discovering an autumn sky wholly empurpled by a setting sun and forests with a foliage that was like the lees of wine, there was flaming, in a vast jardinière, an enormous bouquet of carmin azaleas, sage, digitalis and amaranth.

The all-powerful goddess was hidden in the cushions of the divan, flicking her red tresses against the cerise satin, unfurling her rose petticoat and twirling, on the end of her foot, her tiny morocco slipper. She sighed daintily, arose, stretched her arms, snapped her joints, seized a big-bellied bottle and poured, into a little glass, tapering of stem and shaped like a gimlet, a filament of reddish-brown port.

At that moment, the sun inundated the boudoir with its red gleams, piqued with scintillant flashes the spirals of the glass, caused the ambrosial liqueur to sparkle like burning topaz and, breaking its rays against the copper plates, gave rise to fulgorant con-

DOWN STREAM

flagrations. There was a rutilant medley of flames, upon which the face of the drinker was etched, like those virgins of Cimabue and Angelico, whose heads are to be seen cinctured with nimbuses of gold.

This fanfare of red stunned me; this gamut of furious intensity, of an unheard of violence, blinded me. I closed my eyes, and when I opened them again, the dazzling dye had vanished, the sun had set!

The red boudoir and the drinker have since disappeared; the magic flare is extinguished for me.

In summer, nevertheless, when a nostalgia for red weighs upon me more heavily than usual, I lift my face to the sun, and there, under its piercing sting, impassive, my eyes obstinately closed, I glimpse, under the veil of my eyelids, a red vapor; I call back my memories, and I behold once more, for a minute, for a second, a scene of troublous fascination, an unforgettable enchantment.

A DISH OF SPICES

DECLARATION OF LOVE

I FEEL, welling up in my soul, an inexpressible rage, when I think of you, Ninon. That a girl to whom her mother has said: "You are young, you are beautiful, you are a virgin; all that has a price"—that such a girl should give herself to a rich libertine and fall, by degrees, into the most degrading excesses: that I can excuse. That a girl should give herself for love to a man who, after having made her pregnant, abandons her, like the cad he is, and that such a girl should give herself to the first comer to provide food for her child: that to me is pitiful. But that a girl well reared, who is in a position to gain her living honestly, should deliberately choose to wallow in all the mire and all the puss: such a one I hate and I despise.

Listen, infamous wench. I hate you, I despise you and I love you!

DOWN STREAM

LA REINE MARGOT

I HAD worked all day. Feeling a little tired, I went out to smoke a cigar. Chance directed my steps, in Grenelle, to a tea-garden, five sous admission, including refreshments.

There was dancing in a garden planted with trees and gas-jets. The orchestra was installed at the rear, upon a little platform, and a policeman, leaning against a tree, was smoking a cigarette and casting an indifferent glance upon the unkempt throng that swarmed about him. I contemplated with curiosity the habitues of the place. What a world! Jestling laborers, their caps over their ears, their dirty hands in their pockets, their hair plastered down over their foreheads, their unclean mouths exuding the blackish juice of their short-pipes. Chubby-cheeked, opaque women, clad in worn-out dresses of coarse red linen, their hair done up in ruffled manes, exhaling the rancid odor of a pomatum purchased at a grocer's-sale or in a bazaar.

While I was examining this swarm of rogues and jades, silence suddenly fell and, at a signal from the orchestra-leader, the flute wheezed, the brasses belled, the bass-drum snorted, the bassoon called, and men and women came, went, darted forward, receded, clasped and unclasped each other, twisted and dislocated themselves, flinging their legs in the air.

I had seen enough and arose to go, when there appeared, at the turn of a walk, a creature of strange beauty. One would have called it a portrait of Titian,

A DISH OF SPICES

stepped down out of its frame. The mass of her brown hair, lightly waved over her forehead, provided a contrast with the tristful pallor of her face. Her well formed eyes sparkled bizarrely, and her crude red mouth stood out upon the white of her complexion like a clot of blood that had fallen into a glass of milk. Her costume was simple: a black dress, amply *decolletée*, revealing a pair of fleshy shoulders. No ring clasped her fingers, no drops hung from her ears; only slender threads of gold trickled down over her naked throat, lighting it up with the green gleam of emeralds, set in a medallion of imitation-gold.

How did she come to be here? How did she, so beautiful, so elegant, come to be elbowing this filthy rabble? It is not possible that this woman lives in Grenelle! She has no lover here! I was seeking to solve this enigma, when a sort of working man, pale, sharp-looking, munching a cigarette-butt, with a red cravate flowing over a *decolletée* blouse, approached her and glued his skinny lips to her tiny rose mouth. She returned his kiss and, circling his body with her arm, began to waltz. He pressed her in his arms, while she, her head thrown back, her lips half-closed and mottled with thrills of light, swooned voluptuously under the burning effluvia of his glance.

Was it possible this fellow was her lover! Yes, indeed, it was her lover! She is a girl kept by a rich young man, handsome, well bred, who adores her but whom she detests, just because he is rich, handsome, well reared, and because he is infatuated with her to

the point of madness! This is the one she loves! this blackguardly runt. Ah! he does not treat her with respect, does not obey her caprices, does not speak to her a passionate language; he insults her, flogs her, and she quivers, from fear and from desire, as she undergoes his brutal caresses!

A nausea mounted to my lips, I fled, and as I walked away, I compared the disenchantment I had just experienced to the one I had felt when I loved, with a love so tender, Queen Margerite of Navarre. What a dream! What a debauch of ecstasy! To love and be loved by a queen, ravishingly beautiful, passionate, intelligent, educated! O my queen, my noble charmer, my divine Margot, how I have loved you! Alas! You also betrayed me; authentic memoirs bear witness to the fact that you had for lovers your cook, your lackey and one Sire Pomony, a coppersmith of Auvergne.

And yet, O my beautiful darling, my adored dream, how noble and proud your chroniclers have made you out to be! I loved you, I wept with you when, fainting, drowned in tears, you went into a charnel-house to get the bloody head of the poor La Mole.

Ah! wretched queen, it was not a sublime love, an immense grief that seized you by the throat and caused a river of tears to gush from your big eyes; it was but the burning obsessions, the carnal tumults of an insatiable salacity! Ah! what does it matter after all, poor dear? You have expiated your crimes. Go, sleep in peace, your long sleep, O vilest of queens, most beautiful of prostitutes.

A DISH OF SPICES

RUBENS' FAIR

THE NEXT evening, I was wandering in the streets of a little village in Picardy by the sea. The wind hissed with rage, the billows tumbled one upon another, and the wind-mills etched their slim silhouettes upon the monstrous mass of black clouds. Here and there, along the road, gleamed little chapels, erected by mariners to a protecting Virgin. I walked slowly, kissing your rude lips, breathing in the warm and acrid odor of your mouth, O my old mistress, my ancient Gambier! I heard the creaking of the mills and the angry snorting of the sea, when suddenly there came to my ear the air of a dance, and I perceived a feeble ray of light which shone out redly from the window of a barn. It was a fishermen's and sailors' ball. What a difference from the one I had seen the night before! In place of vagabonds, picked up in some gutter or other, I now beheld lads that were gentle and respectable of face; in place of faces emaciated and eaten by ointments, eyes dry and slate-colored from debauchery, lips thin and smeared with carmine, I now saw good big red faces, eyes lively and gay, lips thick and puffed with blood; in place of withered bodies, I saw, expanding in front of me, enormous pieces of flesh, like those that Rubens painted, with firm and rosy cheeks, like those that Jordaens loved.

At the end of the room was an old man of eighty years, shriveled and shrunken; his face was furrowed

DOWN STREAM

with lanes and gullies, which interlaced to form a capricious lattice-work; his little black eyes, puckered to his brows, were covered with a pale film, like agate balls mottled with white, and his big nose, weirdly jutting out, was pimpled with little nacarat blotches and budding with troubled amethysts.

He was the dean of fishermen, the oracle of the village. In the corner, to his left, four old sea-wolves were seated at table. Two were playing cards, and the other two were looking on. They had, all, the brown sun-burnt hue of an old oak, their hair tangled and graying, their manners truculent and hearty. They drained, in little sips, their cups of coffee and dried their lips on the backs of their sleeves. The game was interesting and close; the one whose turn it was rested his chin in his big hand, the color of cinnamon-bark, and considered his play with uneasiness. He touched one card, then another, without being able to decide which to choose. His antagonist observed him, laughingly, with the air of a conqueror, and the two others drew heavy puffs on their pipes and nudged each other, winking their eyes. One would have said, this was a picture of Teniers. There was lacking, of a truth, only the two trees and the chateau with the Three Towers.

In the meantime, the cornet and violin were playing madly, and big swains, stout-limbed and supple, their ears hung with little golden pears, were gamboling about like apes and whirling the large fishermaidens, who laughed like crazy women. The majority of the

A DISH OF SPICES

latter were ugly, and yet, they were charming, with their little white bonnets, sprinkled with violet-colored flowers, their great bodices and their sleeves knitted in red and yellow. The children and the dogs soon quit the party and were rolling upon the floor. It was no longer a village dance of Teniers; it was Rubens' fair, albeit a modest one, for the mammas, knitting upon the benches, kept surveying, from the corner of an eye, their lads and lasses.

Ah, well! I swear to you, this joy was good to see. I swear to you, the naive simplicity of these rude sailors was ravishing to me, and that I detested, more than ever, those Parisian dens, where writhe, as though lashed with the whip of hysteria, a lot of gutter-naiades and sinister booze-hounds!

DOWN STREAM

COWARDICE

THE SNOW is falling in great flakes, the wind whistles, the cold is intense. I return home in great haste, prepare my fire and my lamp. I am awaiting my mistress. We are going to dine together at home. I have ordered the dinner and bought a bottle of old pomard and a jam-tart (she is such a gourmand!). It is six o'clock, and I am waiting. The snow is falling in great flakes, the wind whistles, the cold is intense. I stir the fire, draw the curtains and take a book, my old Villon. What an ineffable delight, to dine at home, *à deux*, in a corner by the fire. Half-past-six strikes; I listen to hear if her step is skimming the stairs. Nothing—not a sound.—I light my pipe, sink into my easy-chair and think of her.—Five minutes of seven. Ah! it is she, at last.—I throw down my pipe and run to the door; the steps go on up. I sit down again, my heart thumping. I count the minutes. I go to the window. The snow is still falling in great flakes, the wind is still whistling, the cold is still intense. I try to read, but do not know what I am reading. I can only think of her. I excuse her. She must have been kept at the store. She must have stayed at her mother's. It is so cold! Maybe she is waiting for a bus. Poor dear, how I will kiss her little cold nose and sit cross-legged at her little feet! Half-past-seven strikes; I cannot keep still any longer; I have a feeling that she isn't coming. Come on! try to eat. I endeavor to swallow a few mouthfuls, but my throat refuses. Ah! I understand

A DISH OF SPICES

now! A thousand little nothings rise up in front of me. Doubt, implacable doubt tortures me. It is cold. Bah! What difference is cold, wind, snow, when one is in love? Yes, but she doesn't love me.

Oh! but I shall be firm. I shall rebuke her roundly. I must break off with her, anyway! She has been making sport of me for too long. What the dickens, I'm not eighteen any more! She's not my first mistress. After her, another! She'll be angry? That's too bad! Women are not a rare article in Paris! Yes, that's easy to say, but another would not be the same as my little Sylvie, another would not be the same as this monster, with whom I am so madly intoxicated!

I stride the room furiously, and just as I have worked up a pretty rage, the clock jingles joyously, appearing to laugh at my anguish. It is ten o'clock. Go to bed. I stretch out on my bed, hesitating to put out my lamp. Bah! that's all the worse! I put it out. A furious rage clutches my throat; I am stifling.—Ah! yes, it is all over between us! It is all over!—Good Lord! there's somebody coming up. It is she; it is her step. I tumble out of bed, light up and open the door.

"So it's you! Where did you come from? Why are you so late?"

"My mother detained me."

"Your mother! . . . and you told me, three days ago, that you weren't going to your mother's any more. Look here. I'm very much put out. If you can't come more punctually, when, then. . . ."

"Then what?"

DOWN STREAM

"Why, then, we'd better quit."

"All right, let's quit right away. It's just as well. I'm tired of being growled at all the time. If you're not satisfied, I'll go . . ."

And, thrice a coward, thrice an imbecile, I stopped her!

A DISH OF SPICES

CLAUDINE

OF AN APRIL morning, about five o'clock, Just Moravaut, butcher's boy, climbed the rue Regis and directed his steps toward one of the entrances of the Saint Maur market. At the same hour, Aristide Spiker, fish-merchant, emerged from the rue du Cherche-Midi by way of the rue Berite and directed his steps toward the entrance of the market opposite the rue Gerbillon. Just and Aristide walked towards each other and, without saying a word, began belaboring each other's face with their fists. Before any one came to separate them, Just had an eye as swollen as a poached egg and Aristide a nose red as a crushed raspberry. They were taken away to the station, where each might reflect, at his ease, upon the horrors and the vicissitudes of war.

Half an hour after this disturbance had thrown the whole market into a turmoil, the little Claudine arrived with her mother, Mamma Turtaine, in a great cart laden with vegetables. Claudine leaped briskly to the ground, caressed the horse's nose and began running to warm herself. It was marvelous to see her flutter about, with a bandana on her head, in her coarse dress of gray bunting, her colored sleeves and her wooden shoes, stuffed with straw.

The sun rose, as yellow as those nenuphars that swim on the water of pools; the mist vanished, an icy breeze whistled through the air, and the autumn wind began sounding, whole-heartedly, its distressing fan-

fares. The market-gardeners arrived in a throng, carefully muffled, their faces lost in their caps, a violet nose alone emerging from the folds of an old scarf, shoulders protected from the cold by a covering of gray linen, striped in black, hands enveloped in great green gloves. Some unloaded their carts, others went to drink a little glass at the wine-merchant's, while the horses, enchanted at finding one another again, rubbed noses and whinied joyously.

The causeway was laden with fruits and vegetables, and a large pumpkin, cut in half and lying on its back, curved its yellow basin against the sombre purple of peonies, tossed pell-mell in a pile at the edge of the sidewalk.

Three shops alone were open, those of a butcher, a wine-merchant and a druggist. The glass door of the wine-shop was laden with a cloud of steam, which did not permit a glimpse of the drinkers within, except through a veil. Seen thus, they resembled Chinese shadows. These silhouettes danced upon the wall and the door, as upon a white cloth, noses being bizarrely outlined, mustaches appearing immeasurable, beards becoming colossal, while hats assumed farcial forms. At intervals, the door would open, a babble of voices would escape from the room, and the one who came out would dig his hands into his pockets and run quickly to his shop or his wagon. As they labored and drank, good-mornings were exchanged and hands were clasped, with much chuckling and laughter. The butcher lighted his gas and tossed cartloads of meat

A DISH OF SPICES

upon the backs of his lads. His wife yawned and washed off the marble top of the show-case with a sponge. Suspended by the feet from iron hooks in the ceiling, the cadaver of a great ox displayed, under the harsh gas-light, a monstrous visceral cavity. The head had been violently severed from the trunk, and the nerve-ends were still quivering, convulsed like fragments of worms, twisted like piping. The vast opened stomach gaped atrociously and disgorged from its deep aperture a quantity of pendulous red entrails. As in a warm green-house, a marvelous vegetation bloomed in this cadaver. Creepers in the form of veins sprang out from all sides, disheveled boughs expanded along the torso, intestinal flowers unfolded their violet corollas, and great bouquets of fat burst out, whitely, over the red jumble of gasping flesh.

The butcher appeared to be astonished by this spectacle. Near him, on the sidewalk, two old peasants had placed their pipes one against the other and were drawing on them in deep puffs. Their cheeks were inflated like balloons, and the smoke was coming out of their nostrils. They took in a good supply of fresh air, in order to cool their mouths, and placed a little morsel of paper upon the tobacco, which began to crackle, outlining, as it flared up, capricious arabesques.

"Look here, Claudine," said Mother Turtaine, "you can get warm just as well by emptying the wagon as you can by jumping around. Come help me."

"Here I am, Mamma." And coming over to the

DOWN STREAM

left wing of the cart, she allowed her arms to be piled with bundles of flowers and salads.

"Listen," whispered a little peasant girl in her ear. "I understand that Just and Aristide had a fight this morning. I'm sure it was on account of you."

"Oh, the bad boys!" exclaimed Claudine, her small face turning sad. "I've told them so much to be good!"

"Ah! you're all right, but they're like two cocks. They are both in love with you, and you haven't made a choice yet."

"But I don't know. I love one as much as the other, and Mamma loves neither one nor the other. How do you expect me to choose?"

"Mischievous child," said Mother Turtaine, leaping heavily out of the cart, "she chatters and chatters, and the work is not done. I could have done it as fast all alone. Look here, Claudine, go clean our stall and get the warmers ready."

The little one went off, but continued disputing with her friend the merits and defects of her two lovers.

The situation was, as a matter of fact, an embarrassing one. Claudine loved them both, as a sister would two brothers; but from that to choosing a husband between them was a long jump. Just and Aristide were not alike as to face, but each, in his own way, was as good-looking or as ugly as the other. Aristide was, perhaps, the handsomer man, but he evidenced a pronounced tendency to avoirdupois. Just was not so well built, his shoulder-span was not

A DISH OF SPICES

so great, but he gave promise of remaining muscular and not becoming ridiculously larded with fat like his adversary. Just had pretty and very curly blonde hair, but it was not thick, and in spots, one could glimpse a little light under the thicker. Aristide had stiff and graceless blonde hair, but of a more delicate shade. His, moreover, was a truly luxurious forest; the part was barely visible, like a tiny path in a thick wood. Both were frank and good-natured, but pugnacious. Neither had any fortune, but neither was afraid of any kind of work.

"The short of it is," said little Marie, taking up a position in front of Claudine, who was indecisively twirling the ribbons of her pinafore, "the short of it is, this situation can't go on. They will end by cutting each other's throats. I'll speak to your mother, if you don't dare."

"Oh, no, I beg you, don't say anything, for Mamma would scold me, say stupid things to them and forbid them to speak to me."

"Look here, Claudine, we will weigh their good qualities and defects, their advantages and disadvantages, and then we shall see which of the two is the better! On the one hand, Aristide is a fine lad."

"Yes, yes, so he is, a fine lad."

"But do you know that he'll become like a hogs-head? And *dame!* it is disagreeable enough to have for a husband a man whom everybody pities for being fat. It is true," she went on, "that Just is a fine lad."

"Oh, yes, so he is; he's a fine lad."

DOWN STREAM

"But do you know that he will stay skinny as a vine-prop all his life, and, *ma foi*, I'll confess it's sad enough to spend all your days with a man who looks as though he was dying of hunger."

"So that," replied Claudine, with a smile, "it would be better to take a husband who was neither too fat nor too lean; but in that case, one should take neither Just nor Aristide."

"Ah! but no!" said Marie. "Those two lads love you, and one of them, at least, should be made happy."

"Hush! I must run. I hear mamma scolding."

"Ah! *bien oui!*" cried Mother Turtaine, in an angry voice, her hands planted on her hips, her belly protruding under her blue apron, "what's the use of rearing a girl who doesn't pay any more attention than that to what her mother tells her to do! She hasn't even swept our place, and there's no place to stand, there are so many parings."

"Listen, little Mamma, don't scold me," said her daughter, putting on a little wheedling air, which only too well excused the poor lads for loving her. "I won't chatter any more; I promise."

She set about preparing the shop-front, remaining thoughtful all the while. She thought of how the two rivals had fought, deciding it was on this account that neither one nor the other had swept out his little booth, as was his custom. If only they weren't hurt, she thought, and she felt more inclination for the one who had suffered more.

"Look," said her mother, "I'm going after our

A DISH OF SPICES

coffee. See that everything is ready when I come back, so that I can have my breakfast in peace."

"Is it true," said Claudine to Madame Truchart, her neighbor and aunt, "that there was a fight here this morning?"

"That's what they tell me. It was a couple of worthless scamps. They ought to hang fellows who fight like that, or else put them in the army, seeing they love blows."

Little Claudine was silent and dropped the conversation. A quarter of an hour later, her mamma came back, holding in each hand a big bowl, filled with a smoking and brackish liquid.

"*Ab! bien,*" she cried, "it's pretty tales I've heard. It seems that those two blackguards, Just and Aristide, had a fight this morning over you. Just let them come around here! I'll take care of them, myself! And as for you, if you speak a word to them, or answer them when they speak to you, it's me you'll have to answer to. Did any one ever see the like!"

The poor girl had a heavy heart and could not eat. Suddenly, she grew pale and spilled half the contents of her bowl over her petticoat. The two adversaries had just entered the market place, one with a black-and-blue eye, the other with a swollen nose. They parted at the gate and each went to his shop by a different path.

All day long, she regarded them alternately, saying: "The poor lad, how he must be suffering with that swollen face!" That turgid and bloody nose drove

DOWN STREAM

her to despair. Then she looked at the other one. "His eye is ruined!" she murmured. And that eye, projecting from a coal-black circle, made little shivers run up and down her spine. A man must be brutal, she thought, to strike a friend in the eyes like that. She was about to detest Aristide, and then she saw that turgescient nose and came to despise the big Just. She thought of it all night long and could not sleep. What to do, she thought, what to do? It's not their fault if they love me. I'll try to speak to them tomorrow, and I'll make them promise not to fight any more. She fell asleep upon this happy idea, preparing in her little brain fine words that would appease them. She dressed herself, next morning, very carefully, assisted her mother in hitching the horse and, all the way from Montrouge to market, rehearsed her little speech. The difficulty was, how to speak to them without being seen by her mother. She would have to be clever enough to find excuses which would enable her to escape from the shop for a moment and speak to each of them without the other's seeing her. "Chance will furnish me with an excuse, perhaps," and with this consoling thought, she briskly whipped up the horse, which fell into a little trot, ringing, through the sleeping streets, his iron-shod hoofs.

The two rivals were in their places and casting each other defiant looks. She pretended not to see them and went about unloading the wagon, promising herself that, about nine o'clock, when the market was full of people, she would make an escape. And

A DISH OF SPICES

as a matter of fact, about that hour, a stream of women with unkempt hair, covered with raveled shawls and casting joyous looks at their dogs, sporting in the gutters, began flooding the narrow streets that enclosed the market-place. Under pretext of going to seek a bundle of parsley which she had mislaid, Claudine shoved her way into the crowd and was soon at Just's shop. He turned pale at sight of her, blushed suddenly, and his eye became a deeper black. His shop was full of women customers. He barely replied to their questions and would like to have sent them all to the devil, but did not dare do so, seeing that his boss was there and watching him out of the corner of an eye.

"Just," she finally whispered to him, forgetting all the fine phrases she had prepared, "promise me not to fight any more."

"But, Mademoiselle"

"Promise me, or I'll be mad at you for keeps."

"I promise," he said, turning very red.

"Thanks." And she saved herself by running back to her mother.

A quarter of an hour afterward, she fled again and went to find Aristide, who gave her a scared look, swayed upon his legs, stammered a few words and was obliged to sit down, to the vast amazement of the women purchasers, who believed him ill and began to cry out. She barely had time to save herself.

"*Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!*" she murmured, "what a

DOWN STREAM

misfortune! And yet, I've never done anything to make them love me like that, the poor lads!"

About noon, Just came wandering around and slipped her a note, which she went out into the street to open.

"I cannot go on living like this," he said, "I am going to sell my stock and quit the market."

"Ah!" she cried, "that one loves me more. If Mamma's willing, I'll marry him."

A quarter of an hour later, as she was going to look for some chervil at a friend's, Aristide said to her:

"Mademoiselle Claudine, I'm going away. I am too unhappy."

"Ah! *mon Dieu!* he loves me as much as the other; it drives me to despair to be loved like this!"

And even as she said this, she experienced, in spite of herself, a certain joy at knowing she was so adored.

She returned more perplexed than ever. What was she to do? That was the question she incessantly asked herself. As she waited, the days went by, and the lovers did not leave.

"The first who leaves will be the one who loves me more," she thought. Then she would whisper: "No, the one who leaves me first can live without me, and so, he loves me less."

In the meanwhile, each remained at his post, having indulged in the very simple reflection that to depart was to leave a free field for his adversary, who certainly would not follow suit. And so, they were

A DISH OF SPICES

content with observing each other and were furiously tempted to riddle each other's face with fresh punches.

Unfortunately, this insane love which the little eyes and bonny cheeks of Claudine had kindled in the hearts of the poor lads was soon known throughout the quarter. The barber across the way, as he plied his greasy hands and his equally greasy razor over the faces of his customers, was enchanted at having an opportunity to enter into interminable discussions regarding Claudine's beauty and coquettishness. These remarks, which grew in size as they went from mouth to mouth, could not fail to come to the ears of Mother Turtaine. A market-place is a miniature city of the provinces. The inmates spend their time in slandering their neighbors and in robbing them as much as they can, two agreeable occupations, if there ever were any. The concierges of the quarter, tired of complaining of their tenants and deploring the fate that had made them concierges, seized upon this occasion to interrupt their lamentations and took it upon themselves to say more than enough to hang the poor girl. Exasperated by all these slanders and old-wives'-tales, Mother Turtaine resolved to send her daughter to a sister's, at Plaisir, in the department of Seine-et-Oise.

Claudine left with a heavy heart, begging her mother to send for her soon. The first few days seemed very sad to her, and she wrote her mother a letter in which she begged to be allowed to return to the market-place. This letter, however, soon caused her terrible fears. In the course of a few evenings, her

DOWN STREAM

fate had changed. One evening, when she was walking near the aspen-grove, she encountered a fine big lad whose wide-awake manner and powerful carriage pleased her, wholly, at the very first.

The first time, he had looked at her timidly and, feeling the young girl's eyes fixed upon his own, had dropped his head, reddened from ear to ear and had not been able to open his mouth. The second time, he dared to approach her, but he stammered like an idiot and turned redder than the first time. The third time, he opened his mouth and succeeded in stuttering a few words, enough to tell her that he knew her and that his father was a great friend of her mother's; and from that time on, they had become the best friends in the world.

Of an evening, they would slip out and meet down by the hill and stroll along a little creek. Claudine would walk very quietly, with her eyes fixed on the ground, her hands in the pockets of her little pinafore—feeling overcome with terrifying thrills. He would look at her stealthily and die of desire to kiss a little rose-colored spot, on which blew, like a tuft of wild herbs, a small bouquet of wan locks. A score of times, he was on the point of leaning over and

A DISH OF SPICES

skimming with his lips that bit of rose-colored moss; then, at the moment he was bending over, and as his mouth was brushing her hair, Claudine would make a movement, and he would at once resume his calm and walk along by her side, cursing his own timidity and swearing that he should have been bolder the first time. One evening, they were walking along the creek. The moon had tossed back her fur-piece of white clouds and was mirroring herself in the water. One would have thought her a silver sickle on a band of blue moire. Our swain had drawn near Claudine, and just as he was at last about to kiss her on the neck, he perceived the reflection of his sweetheart in the creek. She was smiling at him for being so awkward. This time, he lost his head and roundly kissed the little rose-colored spot, which remained white for a number of seconds and then, suddenly, turned red.

While Claudine was pretending an anger which she was far from feeling, Just and Aristide, become friends through their common distress, were taking turns at composing desolate strophes upon the manner and charms of their fugitive deity. However, since the most exquisite grief is always soothed at last, it happened that one fine day both of them married. Although she did not love them the least bit, Claudine could not but be a trifle vexed when she learned this news. "To be so soon forgotten! Men are monsters."

"Look you, my daughter," sententiously remarked Mamma Turtaine, who had come to join her at

DOWN STREAM

Plaisir, "the more a man loves, the sooner he becomes unfaithful. Remember that well."

"If only my lover doesn't love me as much as Just and Aristide!" thought Claudine, and so, she forbade him to love her.

"If you love me a great deal, I won't marry you," she said.

"But"

"Take it or leave it."

"I agree. It's understood, then, Claudine, that I don't love you, that I detest you."

"Ah! but no, I don't ask you to detest me. I just don't want you to love me very much at first."

"And afterwards?"

"Afterwards, we shall see."

Fifteen days afterward, the marriage took place.

Ah! Claudine, the little rose spot is still red, and your husband does not love you! But what color will it turn when he does love you, and when you permit him to ring upon it the little bell of kisses?

A DISH OF SPICES

THE RED HERRING

THY ROBE, O herring, is the palette of setting suns, the patina of old bronze, the brown-golden tone of Cordovan leathers, the sandal-wood and saffron hue of autumn leaves!

Thy head, O herring, flames like a golden helmet, and one might say that thine eyes were black nails driven into copper spheres!

All the sad and dismal nuances, all the radiant and gay nuances deaden and illuminate, in turn, thy robe of scales.

Besides bitumens, earths of Judea and of Cassel, Scheele's greens and burning shadows, Van Dyke browns and bronzes of Florence, hues of rust and of dead leaves—beside these shine, in all their splendor, green-golds, amber-yellows, orpins, ochres of sumac, chromiums, oranges of Mars!

O glistening and smoke-tarnished one, when I contemplate thy coat of mail, I think of the pictures of Rembrandt, I see again his superb heads, his sun-drenched flesh, his scintillating jewels upon black velvet; I see again his jets of light in the night, his trails of golden dust in shadow, his dawning suns under black firmaments!

DOWN STREAM

CHLOROTIC BALLAD

SOFTLY, draped in a hood of gray clouds, the twilight unfolded its misty tapestries over the melting purple of a setting sun.

She came slowly, smiling a vague smile, poising her thin figure in a white robe, quilted with red peas. Her cheeks were stained, for moments, with purple patches, and her long hair waved over her shoulders, tossing in sombre billows of white and yellow roses.

A crowd of the young and a throng of young girls watched her coming, fascinated by her cruel eye, her sickly smile. She advanced upon them, clasped them in her thin arms and furiously glued her lips to their mouths. They gasped and trembled all over; breathless, aghast, screaming with pain, they writhed beneath the wind of her kiss like grass before the breath of a thunderstorm.

Desolated mothers embraced her knees, grasped her hands and wept, with great sobs; but she, impassive, pale, her fixed eye filled with liquid gleams, her hands clammy, her breasts two darting points, repelled them, gently, and continued on her way.

One young girl crawled to the ogre's feet, clutching her breast with both hands, in dying agony, and spitting blood. "Mercy!" she cried, "Mercy! O Tuberculosis! Have pity on my mother, have pity on my youth!" But the implacable ghoul hugged the girl in her arms and plundered the virgin lips for kisses, long drawn out.

A DISH OF SPICES

The victim still quivered feebly; the other clutched her more tightly and dashed her teeth against the girl's; the latter's body convulsed weakly, then became cold, inert, while her cheeks mantled with glaucous tints and livid vapors.

Then the goddess fluttered heavily; pallid rays gushed from her eye-balls and bathed with bluish glazings the blanched cheeks of the dead.

Softly, draped in a hood of gray clouds, the twilight unfolded its misty tapestries over the melting purple of a setting sun.

DOWN STREAM

VARIATION ON A KNOWN AIR

IT RAINS, it rains, shepherdess; huddle your white sheep: the storm howls, the rain lines the sky with gray threads, and the lightnings streak with white jets the clouds, which crash and break. Gather in your white sheep.

The poor beasts bleat despairingly and raise to heaven their haggard heads; they run, splashing their gray robes with water, hurling themselves upon one another, tangling their feet, falling and rising again, bounding like a billow, while the big black dog, ruffled and drenched to the bone, brushes them, growlingly, with his lowered head.

O my little shepherdess, how you have changed! You, so dainty and so frolicsome, you do not leap in the grass any more, with your stockings of embroidered silk and your tiny rose-satin slippers; you do not clutch any more, with your pretty fingers, your petticoat, puffing and crackling to each of your movements; you plash heavily in the water, with warped shoes and enormous feet! Your beatific face, copper-colored by the sun and swollen by the wind, projects, deplorably red, from under the folds of a dirty, flabby bonnet; your neglected hair no longer exhales the exciting odors of *maréchale*, and your eyes, so bizarrely roguish in their crayon-circles, reveal no longer anything beyond the gross stupidity of a farm woman!

O Estelle! if Nemorin, who had to go to your father to ask for your hand, could have seen you, grown so

A DISH OF SPICES

fantastically ugly, do you think that he would have cried: "How beautiful she is in a bodice! O my mother, see her!" Alas! he also has changed much! In place of a gallant cavalier, in sea-green doublet, trimmed with rose-colored bows, with lilac or light-yellow breeches, I see a gross cowherd, clad in a gnawed smock-frock, dimmed and shrunk by the rain and sun.

Where, then, is your crook, decked out with blue favors, O Nemorin! Where, then, is your scrip, your plaited chemisette, O Estelle! Where, then, above all, is your dapper figure, your wheedling glance, replete with deceitful blandishments?

Alas! all that exquisite and natty gear has long since disappeared! Those undulations of petticoats, those rustlings of linen, those jinglings of fine stones, those hissings of silk in theatric forests, under the blued leaves, have disappeared forever!

And yet, perhaps, you would like to put them on again, those furbelows which I am regretting, chubby-cheeked slattern! You will do like your sisters, your elder sisters; you will go to Paris, and your robust stays will bend under the weight of great gluttonies and lubricious combats! And who knows if, some evening of mid-lent, tired of promenading your adulterated and unwholesome charms over the asphalt sidewalks, you will not take down, in the old-clothes-dealer's backroom, the second-hand costume of a Watteau shepherdess and go to a ball, in quest of uncertain pasturage?

Ah! it would have been better for you to keep your

DOWN STREAM

peasant's rags; it would have been better to remain in your village; for you will regret, more than once, the times when you used to guard your sheep. More than once, you will feel yourself obsessed by an invincible uneasiness when this refrain resounds in your soul, filled with rancor and distress:

It rains, it rains, shepherdess; huddle your white sheep. The storm howls, the rain lines the sky with gray threads, and the lightnings streak with white jets the clouds, which crash and break. Gather in your white sheep.

A DISH OF SPICES

ECSTASY

THE NIGHT had come, and the moon was climbing above the horizon, displaying on the blue pavement of heaven her sulphur-colored robe.

I was seated near my beloved, Oh! very near! I seized her hands and breathed in the warm fragrance of her throat, the intoxicating breath from her mouth. I buried my head in her shoulder; I wanted to weep; ecstasy held me palpitant, dismayed; my soul longed to take wing over the ocean of the infinite.

Suddenly, she arose, disengaged her hands and disappeared in a clump of bushes. And then, I heard a sound as of the rustling of rain on leaves.

My delicious dream vanished . . . I fell back upon the earth, the ignoble earth. O my God! it was true, then, that she, my divine loved one, was, like others, a slave to vulgar necessities!

DOWN STREAM

BALLAD

In Honor of My So

SWEET TORMENT

JEWELER, choose your most precious stones, let them trickle between your fingers; kindle, in multicolored sheafs, the flames of diamonds and of rubies, of emeralds and of topazes; never will their fond flashes sparkle like the eyes of my brown madonna, like the eyes of my so sweet torment!

The eyes of my darling shed morbid swoons, cajoling stupors! They flame like vesper-stars and reflect, at pleasure, the phosphorescent tones of the swelling sea, the fairy scintillations of flitting glow-worms on stormy nights.

The eyes of my darling break the firmest wills; they are a heavy wine that flows to the brim, a philtre that carries vertigo; they are the maddening fumes of hemp, an opium that shakes the soul and drags it, hopelessly lost, into troublous hallucinations and paradisiacal beatitudes.

And what does it matter! Drunkenness, vertigo, enchantment, delirium, I would drink them all, to the point of ecstasy, in those enticing cups. I would assuage my anguishes, I would stifle my rancors in the warm fumes of thy breath, in the unalterable splendor of thy great eyes, O brown enchantress!

I would drink forgetfulness, irremissible forgetfulness, upon thy lips, upon that bed of turbulent flowers

A DISH OF SPICES

which is thy blood! I would open those red corollas and, in so doing, cause to gush out, in a burst of high light, thy teeth, those teeth that invite to libertine combats, those teeth that cruelly gnaw the stuff of hearts, those teeth that sound, so furiously, the charge of kisses!

Jeweler, choose your most precious stones, let them trickle between your fingers, kindle, in multicolored sheafs, the flames of garnets and of amethysts, of sapphires and of chrysoprases; never will their fond flashes sparkle like the eyes of my good madonna, like the eyes of my so sweet torment!

DOWN STREAM

THE LEFT BANK

TIRED OF THE uproar of crowds, the wranglings of the female mountebanks of love, I went for a walk in the boulevard Montparnasse. I reached the rue de la Santé, the rue du Pot-au-Lait and the vague paths that run along the Bièvre. This little river, so blue at Bue, is of the blackness of soot at Paris. Sometimes, even, it has the mouldy breath of mud and of old copper, but it is, almost everywhere, bordered by two rows of tall poplars and framed in by bizarrely melancholy prospects, which have on me something of the effect of distant memories or of the desolating rhythms of Schubert's music. What a strange street, this rue du Pot-au-Lait! Deserted, strangled, descending, by a rapid slope, into a big uninhabited road, with paving bricks enchased in the mud. The rivulet flows along, in the middle of the street, and carries, on its petty cascades, islets of vegetable-peelings, which speckle with green its blackish waters. The houses which border it lean against and support each other. The shutters are closed, the doors are studded with great nails, and sometimes, a throng of young urchins, with dirty noses and curly hair, get down upon their knees and, despite the protestations of their mothers, indulge in a prolonged game of marbles. They are worth seeing, as they squat there, displaying their little patched breeches, from the depths of which protrudes a white rag, leaning upon the ground with the left hand and shooting a small

A DISH OF SPICES

marble into a big hole. One of them will leap up, with cries of joy, while his opponent, a young brat quite as badly accoutred, puts on a sulky air, observing with anxiety the skill of his adversary. A lantern, suspended in the air from ropes attached to two houses facing each other, lights the street of an evening. Some time ago, the ropes broke, and the reflector was fastened up again by a large number of small pack-threads, which enable the big ropes to support the weight. The lantern, in the midst of this net-work of cords, is like a gigantic spider, spinning its web. Once entered upon the long road which connects with this lane, you arrive, after a few minutes of walking, at a small pool, mottled with green folicles. One might take it for some sort of strange greensward, if, now and then, a frog did not leap up out of the grass and cause little drops of brown water to ripple and spurt over the foliage.

The view is limited. On the one hand, the Bièvre and a row of elms and poplars; on the other, the ramparts. A few variegated linens upon a clothes-line and an ass that wags its ears and swishes its flanks with its tail to keep the flies away. A little farther on, a savage's hut, built with a few laths, plastered with mortar and topped with a bonnet of stubble, the whole pierced with a funnel to permit the smoke to escape. That is all. It is distressing, and yet, this solitude is not lacking in charm. It is not like the country in the vicinity of Paris, polluted by the recreations of shop-drudges; it is not like those *bois* which, on Sunday,

DOWN STREAM

teem with all the world, their copses strewn with scraps of greasy paper and bottle-ends. Nor is it the true country, so verdant, so smiling, in the clear light of the sun. It is a world apart, melancholy, arid, but for that very reason, solitary and charming. A few laborers or a few women who pass, with baskets in their arms, the woman dragging behind her an infant, who, in turn, drags a little wooden chariot, painted blue, with yellow wheels—these alone break the monotony of the road. Sometimes, of a Sunday, in front of a tiny wine-shop, the lean-to of which is festooned with raw-green vine-branches and great blue grapes, a family of jugglers will come to give performances for the benefit of the drinkers sitting at the tables outside. I saw, once, three of them, very young, and a girl with a complexion the color of amber, with big, scared eyes, black as obsidian. They had put up a rope smeared with chalk and fastened to two poles in the form of an X. A clown with a lamentably ugly face turned, meanwhile, the handle of an organ. From all sides, I saw children running; they came up perspiring, took their places in a circle and awaited, with impatience, the beginning of the show. The mountebanks were soon ready; they bound their foreheads with rose-colored fillets, laminated with copper butterflies, snapped their joints and launched forth upon the rope.

They were beginners at the trade, and after a few writhings, fell sprawling upon the pavement, at the risk of breaking their bones. The crowd had a good

time. One little devil who had fallen was barely able to get up, rubbing his back as he did so. He was suffering atrociously, and despite heroic efforts at self-control two big tears gushed from his eyes and rolled down over his cheeks. His brothers were disgusted with him, and his sister burst out laughing and turned her back on him.

Suddenly, a big old man, whom I had barely glimpsed, and who, I learned, was the father of this progeny, came forward, tin-cup in hand, and took up a collection, which he emptied upon a rag of a rug. His turn was to come. His elder son placed a trinket on the pavement. The old fellow took up a position in front of it, his arms in the air, and waited thus a few seconds. I had, then, plenty of leisure to examine him. He was a man of about fifty years of age. His naked arms were encircled with fur bracelets, like manacles, and a pair of light imitation-tiger-skin drawers enveloped his loins and the tops of his thighs. The skin of his cranium was cracked, like a mold that had been too long in the fire, and his thick eyebrows fell down over his eyes, which were bruised with aureoles of bister. His sons brought weights, which were given to assistants in the audience. They were not of cardboard, rimmed with iron-filings, but were really of iron. They were placed in front of his feet, and he bent over and seized them. The muscles of his neck swelled and furrowed his flesh like great ropes. He drew himself up and juggled with these masses, as though they were bundles of bran, re-

DOWN STREAM

ceiving them sometimes on the biceps, sometimes on the back, between the shoulders. This athlete had the melancholy air of those old jades who, all day long, turn a mill. A few clever turns, a few perilous leaps ended the entertainment, and the troop entered the wine-shop and ordered drinks.

It was late. The sun was setting, and the clouds which formed the solar entourage appeared to be bespattered with little drops of blood. It was dinner-time, and I entered the wine-shop and took a table beside a big cat, which I caressed, and which rasped my hand with its tongue. I was served with an eatable dinner, and when the time came to roll a cigarette and take my coffee, I looked around at the drinkers who peopled this den.

The jugglers were seated at the left. The old man was snoring, his nose in his glass. The girl was singing and emptying bumpers, while opposite them, a drunkard who had warmed his helmet to a cerise red was telling stories to himself, stories so funny that he almost split laughing. I paid my score and strolled down the street, very leisurely. I soon reached the rue de la Gaité. I was leaving behind me the little frequented paths and fell into one of the most bustling of streets. Refrains of quadrills escaped from the open casements. Large placards at the door of a *café-concert* heralded the début of Mme. Adèle, *chanteuse de genre*, and announced the return of M. Adolphe, eccentric clown. Farther on, in the show-window of a wine-merchant's, there arose edifices of snails, their

A DISH OF SPICES

blonde flesh spotted with green. *Pâtissières* were displaying in their windows, multitudes of cakes, some in the form of domes, others flattened and topped by a roseate and tremulous frosting, the latter streaked with brown stripes, the former disemboweled and exhibiting thick meats of a sulphur-yellow hue. This street well justified its joyous name. While I was all eyes and deliberating whether I should enter a dance hall or a *concert*, I felt myself being tapped on the shoulder, and perceived a friend of mine, a painter in search of fantastic types. Enchanted at our meeting, we set sail together, climbed the street and entered a ballroom. What singular assemblages, these working-men's balls! A jumbling of little working girls and saturnine nymphs, drunk for the most part and knocking against the walls. Mothers of families, with babes that smile and leap with joy. Fine young working fellows, spending their money for a good time, and the vilest of pimps. The girls danced, and the papas and mammas drank warm wine from thick porcelain salad-dishes. The children hoisted themselves to the tables, smiled, yelped and called to big sister, who would smile upon them and come to kiss them as the *ritournelle* ended.

But the hour was getting late, and we wished to go to a *concert*. We left and entered a gas-lighted lane which terminated in a urine-velvet door. The room was large and decorated above with grimacing red-brick masks, with clamorous hair. These masks, evidently and fatuously, were supposed to represent

DOWN STREAM

the emblems of comedy. The stage was high and spacious, and the orchestra consisted of ten or a dozen musicians. Hush! Silence! The curtain was rising, the violins broke into a plaintive air, intermingled with strokes of the cymbals and tremolos from the flutes, and an old gentleman in black, with gloves that were almost clean, with an inevitable air, a livid complexion and a mouth that was thoughtlessly despoiled of teeth, made his appearance. Applause broke from the gallery up above, illy enough directed, we must say. We are in the presence of a first-tenor: we must get that fact, what the deuce! I am none too sure, to tell the truth, what it is he is singing. He bells certain notes and swallows the others. From time to time, in a strident voice, he hurls out the word: "*L'Alsace!*" He is greeted with applause and seems convinced that what he is singing is music. Five couplets follow one another; then he makes a profound bow, and, his left shoulder shaking and his right hand on his bosom, goes to the exit, turns, makes a new bow and retires. Frenzied applause bursts from all sides, cries of "*Bis,*" stampings of feet. The orchestra plays, over again, the first measures of the song, and the tenor reappears, bows and guzzles forth, from his most piercing spigot, the stanza of the song best bepeppered with chauvinism. Then he bows again and runs off, pursued by boisterous acclamations. The cries die down, little by little, and the musicians begin conversing together and drying their hands. As for me, I am admiring, posed

A DISH OF SPICES

in front of me upon a warped body, the redly illuminated face of an old drunkard. What richness of tone! What superb coloring! This fellow belonged, evidently, to the aristocracy of toppers, for he had quartered his gueules upon a field of sable, and it was with no ordinary vermilion and black that he had blasoned his snout, but with the fine flower of wine and pure sunburn of dirt.

I am distracted, alas! from my contemplation by an outburst on the part of the cymbals and a rumbling from the bass-drum. The door in the back-drop opens, and an obese lady with a widely sloping corsage comes forward as far as the organ-blower's hole, and waddling and bawling, with gesticulations:

Ah! rendez-moi mon militaire!

This song is idiotic and vulgar. Oh, well! All in all, I prefer this ineptitude to those desolating ballads in which a little bird pays court to the moss, and in which "your eye full of tears" recurs, in the mock-verses, in the form of a saddeningly sick refrain. It was eleven o'clock when we left.

"Oh, well!" said my friend, "since we have gone so far as to visit this quarter, let's see it through. Let's go to the wine-merchant's. Who knows? It may be fun." We were directly opposite the one in the window of which battalions of snails were strutting. The place was full, but we pushed through and made our way to a little room at the rear, where we found a couple of places, between a coal-heaver,

DOWN STREAM

astonishingly unprepossessing, and two young girls equally ugly, their teeth doing full justice to plates of snails. Of a sudden, all the customers stood up, making way for a little fellow bearing a mandolin.

We were, as I later learned, in the presence of Charles, the famous popular singer.

I hasten to sketch his face for you. Imagine a comical head; a forehead very high, hairy and plump; a pug nose, waggish, inquisitive and addicted to jerks; a brush of a mustache; a thick-lipped mouth of the color of egg-plant; enormous ears attached to his temples like those of a Hindu; a fantastic complexion, apple-green in spots, saffron-yellow in others; and lastly, an astonishing voice, capable of descending to the very lowest notes but nasal in its ordinary tones. He was clad in a great-coat stippled in black and brown, stiff at the collar and slashed at the pockets, with trousers of a bituminous shade. He held in his left hand a large mandolin, rested his chin upon the strings and, with his right hand, tickled the belly of the instrument, which moaned whiningly. He drew himself up and looked about him in a haughty manner. He sang, in the strongest voice imaginable, the *Chant de la Canaille*, received the most affecting attention, drained off a glass of wine with which I presented him and was preparing to leave, when he was called back and insistently besought to regale those present with *Chateaudun*. He sang the stanzas, and every one joined in the refrain:

A DISH OF SPICES

*Les canons vomissaient la foudre
Sur Châteaudun . . . Qu'importe à ce pays!
Il préfère se voir en poudre
Que de se rendre aux Prussiens ennemis!*

His song ended, he left. We did the same and went home to bed.

DOWN STREAM

TO MASTER FRANCOIS VILLON

I PICTURE to myself, O venerable master, your bloodless face, topped by a mangy *bicoquet*; I picture to myself your loose belly, your long bony arms, your heron-like legs, encased in stockings of a dubious-rose hue, starred with rents and covered with scales of mud.

I think I see you, O Villon, in winter, when the ice furs with ermine the roofs of the houses, wandering through the streets of Paris, famished, haggard, shivering, pausing before the drink-merchants' shops and caressing, with covetous glances, the monastic paunches of winebottles.

In think I see you, debilitated with fatigue, tired of misery, squatting in one of those dens of the Court of Miracles, to escape the archers of the watch, and there, far from the sight of all, opening the marvelous casket of your genius.

What a magical gushing forth of stones! What a strange swarm of fires! What an astonishing outburst of rude, red stuffs! What fond flushings of lively and melancholy hues! And when your work was finished, when your ballad was plaited and unfolded itself, bezeled with diamonds and with trivial flints, which merely made more apparent the serene limpidity of the whole, ah, then, you felt yourself great, incomparable, the equal of a god—and then, you fell back into nothingness, hunger tortured your entrails, and you became once more

A DISH OF SPICES

the vulgar fleecer, the ignominious lover of *la grosse Margot*!

You rob the passer-by, they hurl you into a dungeon, and there, interred alive, bent double, splitting with hunger, you cry mercy, pity. You call for aid upon your companions, those old oak-apples, the *francs-gaultiers*, the *ribleurs*, the *coquillarts*, the *marmonneux*, the *cagnardiers*!

Leave him there, the poor Villon! Go, you Madonnas of love whom he has hymned, hey, ho! Margot, Rose, Jehanne the Sausage-Maker, hey, ho! Guillemette, Marion the Lazy-Hide, hey, ho! the little Macée, hey, ho! all the mad throng of ribalds, vagabonds, sluts, wantons and *villotières*! Rouse your men, wake the toppers, and drag them to the succour of their chief, the poet Villon!

Alas! the moats are deep, the towers are high, the pikes of the *haquebutiers* are sharp-pointed; the wine flows, the ale sparkles, the fire flames and the girls are gorged with hideous gluttonies: O poor Villon, no one stirs!

Gnash your teeth, bruise your hands, cry out, weep and groan with anguish; your friends do not hear you; they are at the tavern, under the trestles, drunken with hippocras, bursting with grub, inert, unkempt, fetid, sleeping one upon another, Fremin l'Etourdi upon the good Jehan Cotard, who still jests and stirs, and Michault Cul d'Oue upon that big-lip of a Beaulde. Your mistresses mock you well. They are in the dives of the City, sporting

DOWN STREAM

with the students and the troopers. Their heads covered with pike-wounds, their noses swollen with blows, they rub their red muzzles over the cheeks of the drinkers and, right gallantly, rinse their crops.

Oh! you are alone, very much alone! Die, then, thief; sink into your grave, pimp of gouges; you shall not be less immortal, grandiloquently slimy poet, inimitable chiseler of verse, unparalleled carver of the ballad!

A DISH OF SPICES

ADRIAEN BROUWER

I.

TWO COMPANIONS, the one lean and lank as a stork, the other obese and big-bellied as a hogshead, are galloping along the road to Flanders, puffing on their long pipes. Their appearance is anything but respectable. The tall one has a regular-featured but dissipated face, with a haughty and distinguished manner; the fat one has a vulgar air and purplish face, with a nose as glowing as a live-coal, flowered with scarlet *pompettes*. As to the apparel of the two gentlemen, it is the next thing to rags. The skinny one is clad in a round-jacket which once must have delighted the girls with its rosy hues; but dust and repeated libations have shaded it with red and fuliginous tones. His breeches sag piteously, and his shoes are run-over and smile through their gaping soles. The fat one, clad in tatters the precise shade of which cannot be defined, has hose the primitive color of which must have been a citron-yellow, set off with bluish ribbons, but they are so old, so shiny, so worn, that we should not dare assert they had been of so pleasant a tint in their youth.

"It is astonishing," remarked the fat one, "how the dust parches your gullet! How welcome a jug of ale would be! Ho! my master, invoke the divine Gambrinus to direct our steps to a wine-shop.

"Eh!" exclaimed Brouwer, "you know well enough that the incomparable Kaatje and the incompar-

DOWN STREAM

able Barbara have emptied our pockets at Antwerp."

"Bah! you shall paint a picture, and we will drown our thirst."

"No," said the master, "I have created enough masterpieces, left behind me in wine-shops to pay for drinks. It is your turn, Kroesbeck, to paint and pay the score."

"Alas! you know very well, my arms are still sore from the blows I received when I tried to kiss the pretty Betje."

"That's true," said Brouwer, with a laugh, "but let's not discuss it any more. Here is a wine-shop; drink first, and we'll see to paying afterward."

They entered.

The room was full and so filled with fumes that one might have smoked a herring in it. With their legs stretched out and hats jammed down over their eyes, a number of ragged characters were smoking with all their might, drinking, crying out and disputing. A servant-maid, on her way to wash a supply of linen in the adjoining room, was keeping time, with strokes of the battledor, to the songs which some of these marauders were whining out through their noses. Accustomed to such a sight, the master and his pupil were not astonished by it and, in a short time, took so much snuff and consumed so many pints that they conquered the admiration of the ruffians who peopled this hovel. Then Kroesbeck dug his master with his elbow and remarked to him: "If there were nothing to do but drink,

A DISH OF SPICES

the earth would be a paradise; but unfortunately, one must pay. Look sharp and make a picture."

Brouwer sighed and, taking a little canvas, began painting the smoking room in lively fashion.

This canvas you know. It is in the Louvre. The most salient personage in it is a drinker, seated upon an overturned cask, with his back turned toward us. This rustic has taken so much snuff and emptied so many big tumblers that he has fallen, nose forward, over the table, which lends him support. His shirt has slipped up and bulges out between his straw-colored small-clothes and his iron-gray doublet. Another marauder, more intrepid, we could hardly say more sober, is lighting his pipe at a glowing coal and appears absorbed in this grave occupation. A third presents us with his pug-nosed profile and breathes to the ceiling a cloud of eddying smoke. Finally, there are to be seen, in the mist which envelops the smoking-room, a few peasants talking to a young girl, who permits herself, without squeamishness, to be kissed by one of these vagabonds.

"Perfect!" cried Kroesbeck, striking an attitude in front of the picture. "Ah, Adrian, you have the gift of genius. Hals, your master, was but an infant beside you. Alas! I shall never equal you."

And the poor Kroesbeck went off and sat down in the corner, with a contrite air.

The drinkers had almost all left. The night had come on, and there was to be heard nothing but the

DOWN STREAM

splashing of rain on the window-panes and the crackling of fagots in the fire-place. The door opened, and a tall man entered and came over and sat down by the fire. After a few moments he arose and approached Brouwer from the rear.

"Well, well, master!" he said, "how are you?"

Our painter friend who, for more reasons than one, never heard his name called without fright, looked timidly around at his interlocutor and recognized M. de Vermandois, a rich lord, who had been the first to pay, in shining ducats, for one of his little masterpieces, at the time he had fled his master's house.

"This picture is charming!" continued the gentleman. "I will buy it. The price you fix shall be my own. Bring it to me tomorrow morning."

Then, seeing the rain had ceased, he left, with a friendly wave of the hand to Brouwer.

Elated at this windfall, the painter, with a blow of his fist, made the jugs and glasses that covered the table leap, and called out for more beer.

"Ho! what do you say to that, Joseph?" he cried. "We are rich. Let us solace our souls and drink like popes."

But Kroesbeck had disappeared.

"Where the devil is he?" muttered our hero, staggering to his feet, only to stumble against an enormous mass of flesh which, nose flattened against the floor, arms extended and legs stretched far apart, was snoring melodiously. It was the worthy Joseph,

A DISH OF SPICES

who had fallen under the table, and who, without doubt, had merely added another ruby to the innumerable *fleurons* that adorned his nose. Brouwer surveyed him affectionately, then lurched over, with dandling head, and tottered upon a stool, where he fell asleep.

II

"A PROPOS of Van Dyke," said M. de Vermandois, "I've recently seen your master. He regrets, no less acutely than I, the fact that you should have left his palace to go seek adventure by running about among the wine-shops and the inns."

"It is true," said Brouwer, "Rubens always treated me like a true friend, like a great artist; but his disciples, clad in silks and satins, frightened me. Do you think I could have painted, in that sumptuous atelier, those grimacing mugs, those bizarre bunches of rags, those drunken postures, so grotesque and, at the same time, so natural, which make you smile against your will? Do you think I could have achieved there, with an equal verve, that picturesque realism which you admire? What would you? Inspiration deserts me under the wainscoting; it haunts me in the pot-houses.

At that moment, the door opened and a young girl appeared. She was about to retire at seeing her father conversing with a stranger.

Upon a sign from M. de Vermandois, she entered. Brouwer was dazzled—he who had never frequented

any but the daughters of joy—and remained silent in the presence of this charming young girl. Frame an oval face, of a Raphaelesque purity, with great reddish-brown tresses; picture great turquois-blue eyes and a mouth as red as the wing of the flamingo, and you will have but a feeble conception of the pretty Jenny.

The painter began to understand how one might be happy without living in brothels and carousing with joyous rogues. He resolved to quit his adventurous life.

"And perhaps," he reflected, "thanks to my genius, I may succeed in not being displeasing to her."

He left the house with tears in his eyes and rented an attic, where, for three days, he shut himself up. The third day, despite a few regrets, he resisted the desire to go seek out his companion, the ex-baker, Kroesbeck. He went to the window, lighted his pipe and looked down into the street. His lodgings had been poorly chosen: A wine-shop faced the room where he dwelt, a wine-shop overflowing with toppers and shameless little slaveys. In the midst of them, a fellow of powerful shoulder-span, with pear-shaped drum-belly and a nose covered with pearls, was emitting thick puffs and sucking, with gentle murmurs, on the neck of an enormous *guedoule*. His gross face radiated contentment.

"Look," exclaimed Brouwer, there's Kroesbeck! So, he's decided to paint and pay the score, has he?"

He watched his companion as the latter drank,

A DISH OF SPICES

and a smile of envy crossed his lips. He left the window and attempted to set to work. He could not hold himself to it, but was forced to look down once more into the street. His pupil perceived him.

"Ho! ho! ho!" the latter cried out, on three different notes; and giving a joyous exclamation, he called to his master. It was too much, the finishing stroke. Brouwer ran down, four steps at a time, and, seizing a mug, emptied it, with glowing face and sparkling eye. An hour later, he was sleeping in a corner, completely drunk.

The awakening was not quite so gay. He made up, silently, a bundle of his earthly goods and left town that same night.

Fifteen days afterward, he was back in Antwerp and died there in the alms-house. This man of genius was interred in the cemetery reserved for plague-victims, upon a bed of quick-lime.

DOWN STREAM

CORNELIUS BEGA

IN THE first days of the month of February, 1620, there was born at Haarlem, to Cornelius Begyn, sculpter in wood, and his wife, Marie Cornelisz, a child of the masculine sex, who received the Christian name, Cornelius.

I do not propose to tell you whether or not the said child whined in a lamentable fashion; I do not know whether he was turbulent or calm; and all that, moreover, is little concern of yours or mine. All I know is that, at the age of eighteen, he displayed an immoderate taste for the arts, for fat women and for double-strength beer.

The old Begyn and his wife's father, the celebrated painter, Cornelisz Van Haarlem, encouraged the first of these penchants and vainly combatted the other two.

Marie Cornelisz, who was a pious woman and one versed in the society of abbotts and of monks, endeavored, through these reverend persons, to lead her son back into a better way of life. It was labor lost. Cornelius was better at crying, "Cover me, fellows, and come in the pot! Drink up, ha! Guillemette, you red-head, show us your white teats!" than he was at murmuring prayers and paternosters in a hypocritical voice.

Threats, blows, pleadings did no good. No sooner did he catch sight of a chippy's petticoat, molded in tight folds about a pair of firm haunches, than he

A DISH OF SPICES

would at once loose his head and, dropping brush, palette, dice-box and tin mug, run after that same chippy. While he had, at once, a passion for painting and for drinking, and while he admired, more than anything else, the masterpieces of Rembrandt and of Hals, and the magnificent ordonnance of tuns and big-bellied casks, he was still more enamored of rose-red and silken lips and of shoulders, plump and white as snowdrops that flower in the spring.

Finally, hoping that reason would come with age, and that his love of art would give him some sort of mastery over his deplorable passions, his father had him admitted to the atelier of Van Ostade. Cornelius could not have found a better master, nor could he have found comrades more disposed to run to the common mess-house and drink with the *galloises* and other girls of the town than were Dusart, Goebauw, Musscher and the other companions of his studies.

His gayety and forthright, charming manners pleased them from the start, and they set about giving him a welcome, with such junketings that the entire town was scandalized thereby.

Furious at beholding his name dragged through the most ill-famed spots in Haarlem, the elder Begyn forbade his son to bear the family name and drove him from his house.

Cornelius stood for a moment, panting and disconcerted, then jammed his hat down on his head and betook himself to the sign of the Green-Holly, where

DOWN STREAM

the joyous confraternity of drinkers was wont to assemble.

"What's done is done," cried, in his sharp, tabor-voice, the painter Dusart, when he learned of his friend's misadventure. "Since your father forbids you to bear his name, we are going to baptize you. Should you like to be called Béga?"

"Béga let it be," said the young fellow, "and I would have you know, I am going to make that name famous. From this day on, I renounce pot-houses and free-feeds. I'm going to work."

An immense burst of laughter filled the wine-shop.

"You're crazy!" cried his friends. "Doesn't Ostade drink? Isn't the great Hals an arrant drunkard? Doesn't Brouwer paint all his evenings a perfect topaz with pints of beer? Does that keep him from having genius? No! Well, then! Do like us. Work, but drink."

"Hear that, and hear me," said the big Marion, planting herself close to Cornelius' face, "does that mean you're not going to kiss your Marion's bonny cheeks any more?"

"Good God! as if I didn't always want to kiss them!" replied the young man, brushing with his lips the big orange eyes of his mistress and forgetting his fine resolutions as soon as he had taken them.

"Come on, let's baptize him!" cried the painter Musscher, perched upon a vat. "Landlord, bring your strongest beer, your spiciest gin, so that we may

A DISH OF SPICES

sprinkle not merely the head, but, as befits honest toppers, the gullet of the neophyte."

The landlord did not wait to be told twice, but carried in, with the aid of his lads, a great barrel of beer, while Béga, flanked on one side by his godfather, Dusart, and on the other by his godmother, the big Marion, advanced to the end of the room, to the baptismal font, that is to say, to the vat, where the landlord was waiting to perform his functions of high-priest.

Firmly planted on his massive little legs, rolling his big greenish-jade eyes, wiping with his sleeve his little wen-covered nose, which shone like a copper knob, and brushing with his wide tongue his thick moist lips, this honorable personage at once launched upon a long and rambling discourse, the tendency of which was to prove the happy influence of beer and *skidam* on the brains of artists in general and those of painters in particular. Prolonged applause greeted the orator's periods, and after a fervent address on the part of the godmother, who herself punctuated, with resounding kisses applied to Cornelius' cheeks and with hazardous organ-points, the beribboned phrases of her discourse, the recessional began, to the harmonious strains of a weeping violin and a grating hurdy-gurdy.

For one whole year, Béga continued to lead a joyous life with his companions. His misfortune was that he did not possess the temperament of Brouwer, whose luminous genius was proof against the maddest

DOWN STREAM

debaucheries. Impotence came quickly, and whatever he did, whatever he strove to produce, was but the thin wine of Ostade's work; he diluted with water the strong beer of the oldmaster.

He broke his brushes with rage. Having come to himself at last, disgusted with his friends, despising the girls of the town recognizing the fact that a mistress is but an enemy, and that the more sacrifices one makes for her, the less thanks she gives you, he isolated himself from them all, male and female, and began living in the most utter solitude.

His melancholy grew, and one evening, more solitary and more harassed than usual, he resolved to end it all and directed his steps toward the river. He crossed the town and beheld with a shudder the foaming water under the arches of the bridge. He was about to pluck up courage and leap, when he heard behind him a profound sigh and, turning, found himself face to face with a young girl, weeping. He asked the cause of her tears and, upon his prayers and insistencies, she confessed to him that, tired of enduring the brutal treatment of her family, she had come down to the river with the intention of throwing herself into it.

Their common distress proved a bond between the two unfortunates, who fell in love and became each other's consolation. Béga was no longer recognizable. He who, a month before, had been a prey to piercing anguish and inexorable remorse, was at last tasting the tranquil delights of a calm and peaceful life.

A DISH OF SPICES

As a climax to his happiness, his talent came back to him with his youth, and it is from this epoch that his best canvases date.

Everything was happy in the young household; honors and money had decided at last to flow in, when suddenly, the plague broke out in Haarlem.

The poor girl was attacked by it. Béga installed himself at her pillow and would not leave. Death was near. He wanted to hurl himself into the arms of his loved one, press her to his bosom, inhale the breath of her mouth and die upon her breast, but his friends prevented him.

"I want to die with her!" he cried, "I want to die!"

He implored those who held him back to set him free.

"I swear to you," he told them, "that I will not go near her."

He then took a cane, placed one of its ends against the mouth of the dying woman and begged her to kiss it. She smiled sorrowfully and obeyed; three times, she brushed the cane with her lips; then he quickly brought it to his own and glued his lips to the spot that she had kissed.

Honbraken, who reports this fact, adds that, stricken with grief, Béga was himself taken with the plague, and that he died a few days afterward.

DOWN STREAM

THE ENAMELER

ONE FINE morning, the poet Amilcar jammed his black hat down over his head—a celebrated hat, of a prodigious height and unaccustomed width, full of dents and curves, of wrinkles and ridges, of crevices and contusions—put his hand into a pocket under his left breast, drew out a long-stemmed earthen pipe and took his way to the new domicile which a friend of his, the painter José, had chosen.

He found the latter couched upon a landslide of cushions, with a mournful eye and wan face.

"You are sick," he said to him.

"No."

"You are sure you are quite well?"

"No."

"You are in love?"

"Yes."

"*Patastras!* My God! And with whom?"

"With a Chinese girl."

"With a Chinese girl? You are in love with a Chinese girl!"

"I am in love with a Chinese girl."

Amilcar sank down upon the only chair with which the room was furnished.

"But tell me," he exclaimed, when he had emerged from his stupor, "where did you meet her, this Chinese girl?"

"Two steps from here, behind that wall. Listen. I followed her one evening and found out that she

lived here, with her father. I rented the room next hers, and I have written her a letter, to which she has not yet replied, but I have learned her name from the concierge: her name is Ophelia. Oh! if you only knew how beautiful she is," he cried, getting to his feet. "A complexion like a ripe orange, a mouth as red as the inside of a water-melon, eyes as black as jet!"

Amilcar grasped his hands with a desolate air, and went away to announce to his friends that José had gone crazy.

Barely had he crossed the threshold, when José bored a little hole in the wall with a gimlet and set himself to watch for a glimpse of his gentle deity. It was eight o'clock in the morning, and no one was stirring in the neighboring room. He was beginning to despair, when he heard a yawn, followed by a resounding thud, that of some one leaping to the floor, and a young girl appeared within his circle of vision. He felt something like a blow in the stomach and came near fainting. It was she, and it was not she. It was a French woman who resembled, as much as a French woman could, a Chinese. This was the yellow girl whose glance had bowled him over. And yet, it was the same deep-set and cajoling eye; but the skin was pale and tarnished, and the red of the mouth was not so intense; in short, it was a European woman! He descended the stairs, precipitately.

"Has Ophelia a sister?" he inquired of the concierge.

"No,"

"Well, then, she's not Chinese?"

The concierge burst into a laugh.

"What do you mean, not Chinese! *ah cà!* have I a face like hers, I who wasn't born in China?" And the old monster rambled on, admiring, meanwhile, her wrinkled skin in the foulest of mirrors. José remained standing there, bewildered, stupified, when a voice made the stones of the concierge's lodge tremble.

"Is Mlle. Ophelia in?"

José turned and found himself confronting, not the face of an old fox, as the voice had seemed to indicate, but that of an old woman, puffy as a leather-bottle, the nose ridden by enormous barnacles, with a mouth that described capricious zigzags in the turgidities of the surrounding flesh. Upon receiving an affirmative response from the janitress, this creature went up, and José perceived that she held in her hand a box of waxed cloth. He followed close on her heels, but the door closed after her; then he hurled himself into his room and glued his eye to the hole he had drilled in the partition.

Ophelia was seated, with her back turned toward him, in front of a large glass, and the woman, having removed her tartan, opened her valise and took out a large number of little boxes, stumps and brushes. Raising Ophelia's head, as though she were about to shave her, she spread out upon the young girl's face a reddened-yellow paste, then gently brushed the skin, kneaded a little morsel of wax in front of the fire and proceeded to correct the nose, matching

its hue with that of the rest of the face, and soldering, with a milky-white substance, the artificial morsel to the flesh of the true nose. Finally, she took her stumps, rubbed them with the powder in the boxes and spread a light layer of pale blue under the black of the eye, which became hollow and elongated in the direction of the temples. The toilet finished, she stepped back a distance, the better to judge the effect, dandled her head and came back to her pastel, which she retouched here and there, then gathered up her utensils and, after having pressed Ophelia's hand, took a sniffing leave.

José stood inert; his arms had dropped. Eh, what! it was a picture he should have loved, a masked-ball effect! He ended, however, by collecting his senses and running after the enameler. She was already far down the street. He upset everybody, cut across streets and finally reached her side.

"What is the meaning of all this?" he cried, "Who are you? Why did you transform her into a Chinese?"

"My dear Monsieur, I am an enameler. Here is my card. Wholly at your service, if you have need of me."

"Oh! to the devil with your card! cried the painter, all out of breath. "I beg you to explain to me the meaning of this comedy."

"Oh, for that matter, if you insist, and if you are so decent as to offer a poor old artist a little glass of ratafia, I will tell you the whole story, why it is I come every morning to paint Ophelia."

"Come on," said José, pushing her into a wine-shop

DOWN STREAM

and installing her in a chair in a private booth, "here is your ratafia. Speak."

"I must tell you, first of all," she began, "that I am a very clever enameler. For that matter, you have been able to see for yourself And by the way, how did you come to see?"

"That is of small importance; it can't possibly concern you. Go on."

"Ah, well! I was just telling you, then, that I am a very clever enameler, and that if you ever"

"To the facts! To the facts!" cried José, furiously.

"Don't fly into a passion; you know very well that anger"

"But thou makest me boil, old wretch!" screamed the painter, who felt a furious desire to strangle her. "Wilt thou speak?"

"Ah! but begging your pardon, young man, I do not know why you permit yourself to 'thou' me and to call me an old wretch. I warn you at the start that if"

"Oh, my God!" groaned the poor lad, stamping his foot, "it is enough to drive one mad."

"Look here, young man; keep still, and I will go on. Above all, don't interrupt me," she added, sipping her glass. I was telling you, then"

"That you are a very clever enameler; yes, I know that; I have your card. Come, let's get on. Why does Ophelia have herself painted as a Chinese?"

My God, but you are impatient! Do you know the man who lives with her?"

A DISH OF SPICES

"Her father?"

"No. In the first place, he is not her true father, but merely her adopted father."

"Is he a Chinaman?"

"By no means. He is as much a Chinaman as you and I. But he has lived a long time in Thibet and made a fortune there. This man, who is a fine and respectable fellow—I will even confess to you that he resembles a little my late husband who"

"Yes, yes, you've already told me that."

"Bah!" said the woman, regarding him with stupefaction, "I have spoken to you of Isadore?"

"Please be good enough to leave Isadore in his tomb. Drink your ratafia and go on."

"*Tiens*, it's funny; and yet, it seems to me that But it makes little difference. I was telling you that he was a fine and worthy man. He married, over there, a Chinese girl, whom he buried at the end of a month of wedlock. He nearly went crazy, for he loved his wife, and his friends forced him to return to France as quickly as he could. He re-established himself here, little by little, and one evening, he found in the street, fainting from cold and hunger and ready to give herself for a morsel of bread, a young girl whose eyes had the same expression as those of his former wife. She resembled her, even, as regarded size and figure. It was then that he proposed to her to leave her all his fortune, if she would consent to be painted every morning. He came to find me, and every day, at eight o'clock, I put on her disguise. He

comes at ten and breakfasts with her. Never anything more. From the day he picked her up, he has never seen her as she really is. There. Now I must go, for I have work to do. *Bonsoir, Monsieur.*"

He sat there, stupefied, motionless, feeling that his ideas were escaping him. He returned home in a pitiable state.

Amilcar, meanwhile, had arrived, followed by one of his friends who was a physician. They had a vast deal of difficulty in rousing from his torpor the unfortunate José, who would talk of nothing but going to throw himself in the Seine.

"*Ma foi!* it is not worth while drowning one's self over a little thing like that," said a tart little voice behind him. "I am Ophelia, grandpa, and am not so cruel as to let you die of love for me. You may profit, if you like, from the old man's absence and go down to the silks-shop. I have just been wishing for a new dress, and I will permit you to present me with one."

"Oh, no!" cried the painter, profoundly revolted by a bargain of this sort. "I am cured forever of my love."

"To hear words like that coming from the mouth of his beloved, or to receive a douse of cold water on the head, the effect is the same," observed the poet Amilcar, running down the stairs; and as he went, he immediately started rhyming a sonnet, which he sent the next day to a pretty little thing, a sonnet beginning, somewhat satirically, as follows:

"O Lily-Flower!"

CRITICAL PAPERS

From

Certains and L'Art Moderne





OF DILETTANTISM



ONE OF THE MOST disconcerting symptoms of the age is the promiscuity with which it bestows its admirations. Art having come to be, like sport, one of the recondite occupations of the rich, exhibits follow one another with an equal success, provided always the tradesmen of the press are among those present, and provided the wares are displayed in a well known gallery, in one looked upon by all as being "of the better sort."

There is an explanation for the vogue of these indoor sports.

In the first place, the worldly, with that aridity of brain which has fallen upon them, discover, in the regular parade of drawings and canvases, certain frivolous conversational resources, which may be employed in supplementing thread-bare political discussions and the readily exhaustible tittle-tattle of the theatre. Then, too, commonplaces upon painting are sometimes convenient, of an evening, in filling in the gaps between bits of wordly scandal, in exorcizing the somnolent reflections of card-players or covering up the diplomatic silences in a game of whist.

Finally,—and this reason is sufficient in itself—to visit and, so to speak, to admire works which are as different and mutually hostile as possible implies a largeness of spirit, an elasticity of artistic girth that is truly flattering.

In literature, more particularly, there is a swarm of unprejudiced connoisseurs. All the world, as a matter of fact—and who shall doubt it?—is an expert judge of style. Sometimes, it is true, certain old fossils are found, beings behind the times, bourgeois *naïfs*, who confess they are not absolutely sure of the appreciations they express of painting; others will admit, in a pinch, that they are lacking in musical sense, and will even go so far as to assert that the works of Wagner are, perhaps, not wholly insane, after all; but none among them has ever confessed his perfect inability to grasp a page of verse or prose. Take, in the mob of Paris, the most talked-of prince, the most maggot-ridden corner fruit-vendor; choose, from the lot, the filthiest girl of the town or the most conspicuous baroness; and at once, you will receive a deliberate, fixed, firmly-reasoned opinion upon any book. Never, practically never, will a person be found who will admit that he is incapable of judging even the most complicated of arts and one hedged with the haughtiest of barriers.

More over, who of us has not witnessed, among those paper-bound books which the bourgeois and the worldly call “their libraries,” the indecent elbowing of a Flaubert by an Ohnet, of a Goncourt by a

Delpit? Who has not been deliciously amused, when the connoisseur would toss off, negligently, some such remark as this: "As for me, you see, I am an eclectic. Everything interests me. I have here, without regard to schools, specimens of the most diverse varieties of art." Did not a young gentleman, who is said to admire, very sincerely, the *Assommoir* of Emile Zola, express very recently, in my hearing, an ardent desire to see M. Sarcey, the senile buffoon, the rainy-day errant-boy of *Le Temps*, collect in book form the theatrical ejaculations that he perpetrates every Monday!

Oh, well! these individuals are the open-minded ones, the delicate scullions of the arts; they are the dilettanti!

Ah! but how we have come, it may be, to abuse that word, dilettante, in these latter days! Fundamentally, leaving aside the absurdly false meaning which has been given it, and coming to grips with the word itself, we arrive, upon decomposing it, at its two real significations:

Imbecility, on the one hand — cowardice on the other.

Imbecility on the part of the worldly; cowardice on the part of the press, which forms the opinions of the mob.

Imbecility, that is to say, from the artistic point of view, which is the one that concerns us here: nonsense replete with babble of art; agile encomiums drawn forth, like lotto-balls from their pocket, by

some petty felicity achieved; the perfection of ignorance translated into eulogistic jazz.

The most convincing example of the point I have been attempting to make was furnished us, on the side of pictorial art, a few years ago. The shows of Delacroix and M. Bastien Lepage were held at the same time, and the ladies, who, as every one knows, are so keenly interested in painting—and who understand it quite as well as they do literature, which is saying not a little!—would pass, without the raising of an eyebrow, from the Beaux-Arts exposition to that of the Maison Chimay, regarding with an equal admiration, the *Crusaders Entering Constantinople* of Delacroix and the operatic shepherdesses, costumed by a Grevin of the wine-shops or a Siraudin of the suburbs, which represented the work of M. Lepage. Commonplaces rained. "One admires the beautiful wherever it is to be found. Because Delacroix was a great painter, was that any reason why M. Bastien should not be another?" And not a person, no, not a one, shuddered at that ridiculous familiarity between office and salon, at that incredible jostling of a master by a flunkey.

But these are the unconscious ones. Cooly, they promenade, gauging the work of the two painters, unquestioningly associating with it, in their need of material for eulogy, that of Lobrichonne and Adrienne Marie, even though death finally has stopped the stream of sentimental vignettes with which that industrious pair formerly flooded us.

Cowardice is a word that applies to the art critic. Like the critic of literature, who makes criticism his trade, the art critic is generally a man of letters who is not able to produce, in his own medium, a veritable work of art. Among these, some possess the cerebral vacuity of the mob that envies and apes them; their opinions are always known. But there are others, more open-minded and craftier, who, in the name of dilettantism, insist upon the necessity of not committing themselves, upon the need of affirming nothing, which amounts to cowardice of thought and hypocrisy of statement.

For these critics, there is a certain *terrain de rapport* beyond the fluctuating ground on which they ordinarily move. To extol or to disparage artists who are dead; to avoid committing one's self in speaking of those who are living; to incense, with penurious phrases, the academic prize milk-cows of old; to play the clown with worn-out theses and ideas long since tossed into the discard; to discuss, under pretext of analysis, the most fetid commonplaces, in a muddled argot, simulating produndity under the cloak of a meaningless obscurity: that is the trick. The critic, hesitant and satisfied, drained dry and weak, who follows this practice is at once held to be a man of taste, a highbrow, fastidious and refined—Oh! above everything, fastidious and refined! All honors are his, and all profits and, I fancy, all else he wants.

No, the truth is, one cannot understand art or love

it truly, if one is an eclectic, a dilettante. One cannot, sincerely, go into ecstasies over Delacroix, if one admires M. Bastien Lepage; one cannot love M. Gustave Moreau, if one approves of M. Bonnet, or M. Degas, if one tolerates M. Gervex.

Happily, this profitable state in which the dilettante finds himself has another side. His excesses of pusillanimity, his debauches of prudence are fatal, and his language, becoming weak and driveling, returns to the dull and leaden style of the Institutes or liquefies in the humid verbalisms of M. Renan. For there can be no power, if one does not love with passion or hate with passion. Enthusiasm and scorn are indispensable in creating a work of art. Power is to the sincere and the ill-tempered, not to the indifferent and the skulking.

And how many painters are there today who not only paint, but who fume and suffer over their works?



GUSTAVE MOREAU



AR REMOVED from that rout which pours for us, each Month of Mary, the spiritual ipecac of great art, M. Gustave Moreau has refrained, for a number of years, from converting his canvases into real estate, under the muslin tents, like wretched canopies hung out to dry, to be found in the glass outhouses of the Palace of Industry.

He has, likewise, abstained from fashionable exhibitions. His works have, therefore, been rarely viewed, and only by a few dealers; though in 1886, a series of his water-colors was shown in the Goupil Galleries in the rue Chaptal.

Those who visited that exhibition-room found an auto-da-fé of immense skies in ignition, globes blotted out by bleeding suns; hemorrhages of stars, flowing down in purple cataracts over tumbling tufts of clouds.

Against this background of terrible din, silent women passed, nude or appareled in jeweled stuffs, like the bindings of the old Evangelists: women with hair of shaggy silk, with pale blue eyes, hard and

fixed, and flesh of the frozen whiteness of milk; Salomes holding, motionless upon a platter, the head of the Baptist, which shone, soaked in phosphorus, under the quincunxes with shorn leaves, of a green that was almost black; goddesses galloping on hippogriffs and streaking, with the lapis lazuli of their wings, the agony of the clouds; feminine idols, in tiaras, upright on thrones, at the top of stairs submerged in extraordinary flowers, or seated, in rigid poses, upon the backs of elephants with green-mantled foreheads and breasts hung with orphrey, elephants strung with pearl-ropes like cavalry-bells, stamping about upon their own heavy image, reflected in a sheet of water and splashed by the columns of their ring-circled legs!

One identical impression surged up from these various scenes, an impression of spiritual onanism, repeatedly but chastely performed; the impression of a virgin with a body of solemn grace and a soul exhausted by the reflections of solitude, by secret thoughts; the impression of a woman, self-retained, yet raving and crying out, in the solemn formulas of dark prayers, invitations to sacrilege and to lust, to torture and to murder.

Far from this room, in the melancholy street, the dazzling memory of these works persisted; but the scenes no longer appeared in their entirety; they broke up, in memory, into indefatigable details and minute and strange accessories. The finish of those jewels, with contours engraved in water-color, like

DOWN STREAM

beaks laden down with the weight of plumage, the delicacy of those plants, with their tangled stalks and trunks patiently interlaced, embroidered like those jeweled guipers formerly worked for prelates, the up-gushing of those flowers, resembling, at once, in their forms, religious goldsmith work and water-flora, with lilies and pyxes, chalices and algae intermingled—all this surprising chemistry of super-accentuated color, carried to its extreme limit, mounted to the head and intoxicated the sight, until, dumfounded and without knowing it, one found one's self stumbling along a row of unfamiliar houses.

Then, when the eye, upon getting its bearings, had recovered its serenity and looked about, it beheld that shame of modern taste, the street: boulevards along which vegetated trees orthopedically corseted in iron, boulevards trussed, by bridges and causeways, in cast-iron hoops; the causeways shaken by enormous omnibuses and ignoble conveyances; the sidewalks filled with a hideous throng in quest of money, with degraded women, bestialized by frightful bargains, with men reading infamous newspapers or dreaming of fornications and trickeries, among the shops where the licensed corsairs of commerce and the banks lay in wait to dispoil them—and one understood still better, then, the works of Gustave Moreau, works independent of time, fleeing to the beyond, soaring in a land of dream, far from the excremental ideas secreted by an entire nation.

For in short, when the moment definitely has arrived in which money is the Holy of Holies, to which all humanity, flat on its belly and slobbering with covetousness, pays homage; when a country, devastated by a form of government accessible to all, has a running sore in every joint and suppurates constantly through its journalistic abscesses; when art, despised, lowers itself to the level of the picture-purchaser; when a work of pure art is regarded, universally, as a crime of *lèse-majesté* against a doddering old world, fed up on commonplace excrements,—in such a case, it follows, fatally, that a few beings, lost in the horror of their times, must dream their own dreams in the discard; and from the soil of these dreams spring flowers of an inconceivable and vibrant beauty, of a proud and feverish perfume,—but how sad a perfume it is!—The theory of the milieu, adapted by M. Taine to art, is a just one, but inversely so, when it is applied to great artists, for their environment, by the hatred which it inspires in them, merely leads these latter to revolt. In place of modeling and fashioning the artist-soul to its image, environment creates, in the wilds of Boston, the solitary figure of an Edgar Allan Poe; and it shames France by creating a Baudelaire, a Flaubert, a Goncourt, a Villiers de l'Isle Adam, a Gustave Moreau, a Redon and a Rops, exceptional beings who, disgusted by the promiscuities forced upon them, have turned their steps back through the centuries, hurling them-

DOWN STREAM

selves into the abyss of past ages and into the tumultuous spaces of nightmares and of dreams.*

* Huysmans' definitive word on Moreau will be found in *L'Art moderne*, in his review of the Official Salon of 1880: "Whether one loves, or does not love, these fairy enchantments, blown from the brain of an opium-eater, it must be admitted that M. Moreau is a great artist, and that he, today, towers a whole head above the banal mob of historic painters."



DEGAS

I



BE ASSURED, however, that artists whose brains are less nomadic, whose stay-at-home imaginations bound themselves by the present age, fell for that age an execration none the less lively, a contempt none the less firm, provided they are superior minds and not of those subaltern souls to whom alone the method formulated by M. Taine is applicable.

In such a case, their art evolves in a different fashion; it becomes concentrated and stands its ground, and in works bantering or ferocious, the artists proceed to paint that milieu which they abominate, that milieu the ugliness and the shame of which they scrutinize and express.

And that is the case with M. Degas.

This painter, the most personal and the most terebrant of all those whom this unfortunate nation, without suspecting the fact, possesses, has voluntarily exiled himself from special exhibitions and public places. In an age when all painters wallow in the trough of crowds, he has achieved, in silence and far from the crowd, works which are not to be equaled.

A few of these were exhibited, in 1886, as an insulting adieu, in a house in the rue Laffitte.

This exhibition was made up of a series of pastels, thus labeled in the catalogue: "Sequence of feminine nudes, bathing, washing or drying themselves or having their hair combed."

M. Degas, who, in his admirable pictures of danseuses, had already so implacably rendered the downfall of the female mercenary, debased by mechanical frolics and monotonous leapings, brought with him this time, to his studies of the nude, an attentive cruelty, a patient hatred.

It seemed that, exhausted by the baseness of his environment, he had determined to indulge in a reprisal, by hurling in the face of his century the most extravagant of insults, by overthrowing the one idol constantly spared, namely, woman, whom he proceeded to vilify by picturing her in the bath-tub and in all the intimate and humiliating poses of her toilet. And in order the better to sum up her trashiness, he chose her short, fat and drum-bellied, that is to say, with all grace of contour drowned under surges of skin, all carriage, all line, from the plastic point of view, being thus lost, the woman, no matter to what class she belonged in life, becoming a butcher's wife, a creature, in a word, whose vulgarity of figure and coarseness of features inspired, at once, continence and horror.

Here, it is a red head, dumpy and stuffed, bending her spine and bringing into evidence her sacrum bone

upon the strained rotundity of her buttocks; she is breaking herself in two in the effort to bring her hands behind her back and squeeze the sponge, the water from which trickles down her vertebral column and splashes along her loins. Here, it is a blonde, squat, stubby and erect, likewise turning her back on us; she has finished the labors by which she wins a livelihood and, resting her hands upon her haunches, she spreads herself out in a movement which is rather like that of a man warming himself in front of the fire and lifting the flaps of his coat. Here, yet again, it is a crouching wench; she leans to one side, lifts herself on a leg and passes an arm under it, attaining her end within the zinc of the tub. Finally, here is one, seen this time from the front, drying the top of her belly.

Such are, briefly cited, the impitiable poses which this iconoclast assigns to that being before whom inane galants swing incense. There is, in these pastels, with their mutilated stumps, jostled throats and crippled gestures, a whole series of attitudes which are inherent to the woman, even the young and beautiful one, who may be adorable when erect or reclining, but who becomes froggish and ape-like when, like this one, she is forced to bend down to conceal her losses with dressings.

But in addition to this special note of hatred and contempt, the most visible thing in these works is the unforgettable veracity of types, depicted with a thorough and ample draughtmanship and with a

lucid and masterly passion, as though the whole had been done in a cold fever. The thing to be seen is the dull yet ardent color, the mysterious and opulent tone of these pictures, the supreme beauty of flesh, rendered bluish or rose-red by the water and lighted by closed windows, draped in muslin, in sombre rooms, in which, by the veiled daylight of a court, are to be discerned walls hung in Jouy cretonnes, wash-stands and tubs, flasks and combs, wooden-backed brushes and foot-warmers in rose-copper.

We have here no longer the even and tender, always nude flesh of goddesses, that flesh the inexorable formula of which is to be viewed in a picture of Regnault, in the Musée Lacaze, a picture in which one of the three Graces is hoisting a well-oiled flank of rose-hued percale, lighted within by an old woman. This is, rather, flesh undressed, real, alive, flesh that has known the shock of ablutions, flesh the cold metallic quality of which has been deadened.

Among those who visited this exhibition, some, in the presence of that nude who is to be seen crouching face forward, with a belly free from the usual painter's tricks, cried out in indignation at such frankness, even though they were struck by the life which emanated from these pastels. They ended by exchanging a few scandalized or disgusting reflections, flinging behind them as they left the one big word: "It is obscene!"

Ah! if ever works of art were so little obscene; if such works were ever, without any dilatory precau-

tions and without any ruses, absolutely and decisively chaste, it was these!—They even glorified a disdain of the flesh, as no artist, since the middle ages, had ever dared to glorify it!

And the thing goes still further, for this is no revisable disdain on the part of the male; it is, rather, the sure and penetrating execration which certain women feel for the devious joys of their sex, an execration which leads them into atrocious reasonings and provokes them to defile themselves, even while loudly avowing the humid horror inspired by a body which no lotion can purify!

A powerful and isolated artist, without admitted predecessors, without valid lineage, M. Degas yet conveys, in each of his pictures, the sensation of accurate novelty, as well as so just an impression of the unfamiliar that if one surprises a feeling of astonishment in himself, he is almost angry. His work belongs to realism, realism of a sort which the stupid Courbet could not understand, of a sort conceived by certain of the Primitives: that is to say, an art expressive of an expanded or abbreviated surgency of soul, in living bodies, in perfect accord with their environment.

DEGAS

II

ONE QUESTION may now be raised. When will the high place which this painter ought to occupy in contemporary art be recognized? When will it be

DOWN STREAM

generally understood that this artist is the greatest we today possess in France? I am not a prophet, but if I am to judge by the ineptitude of the enlightened classes, who, after having for long condemned Delacroix, do not yet suspect that that Baudelaire is the poet of genius of the nineteenth century, that he towers a hundred feet above all the others, including Hugo, and that the masterpiece of the modern novel is the *Education sentimentale* of Gustave Flaubert,—and yet, literature is said to be the one art that is most accessible to the masses!—if I am to judge by this, I can believe that this truth, which I am the only one to write today, concerning M. Degas, will probably not be recognized until after an unlimited period of years.*

*From L'Exposition des Indépendants (1880).



FELICIEN ROPS



THE VIEW of an erotic work, done by a true artist, leads me to obscure descents into the depths of souls. Far from those nudes, which I took, at first, a melancholy pleasure in contemplating, I am led to dream of their creators; and I ask myself to what impulsions, to what sentiments the latter were obedient, at the time they executed such works as these.

Putting aside the venal point of view, when dealing with an artist whom I know to be a decent fellow, I feel, that I must, for that reason, repel any suspicion of infamous habits on his part; I must put far from me the idea that his pictures represent episodes from his intimate life, since the moment debauchery achieves an effective affirmation, that moment art, prostrated, falls into a senile coma and dies. Moreover, the man who yields to lascivious needs is in no condition to transfer them either to paper or to canvas. I would add that, generally, the man who celebrates virtue, proclaims decency and exalts love will be found to conceal, under the prudish and glacial allurements of a work of art, studious turpitudes, to which he makes an elaborate surrender in the costly silence of safe places.

DOWN STREAM

The hypocrisy which veils, so deliberately, the ordures of old England, prey to the infantile passion for rapes, explains easily the conduct of that people, in their repressed existence and in their art.

At bottom, when one stops to think of it, the contrary is true, for there are no really obscene persons except the chaste ones. Everybody, the truth is, knows that continence engenders frightfully libidinous thoughts, and that the man who, not being a Christian, is involuntarily pure becomes overheated in solitude, goes out of his head and begins to rave, until he comes, finally, in his lively dreams, to the point of orgiastic delirium.

And so, it is altogether likely that the artist who violently treats carnal subjects is, for one reason or another, a chaste man.

But this explanation does not appear to suffice, for, upon examining one's self, one discovers that, even in not preserving an exact continence, but while experiencing a sincere distaste for sensual pleasures, one is troubled still by lascivious ideas.

It is then that a bizarre phenomenon makes its appearance, the phenomenon of a soul which, without physical desires, suggests to itself lewd visions.

Impure or not, artists, their nerves stretched to the breaking point, constantly endure, more than others, the unbearable turmoils of lust. I am not speaking here of the act provoked by lust itself, of the act of fornication, which is nothing more than a

breach of convention, and which bears witness, merely, to a temperament more or less excitable, to nerves more or less vibrant, to organs more or less strong. I likewise am not speaking of the intense desire which precedes and implores the venereal act, for it reveals only a convenient awakening of the senses, or of docile and long-guarded reserves. I am speaking exclusively of the Spirit of Lust, of isolated erotic ideas, without material correspondences, and without the need of any animal outlet to appease them.

The scene dreamed by the artist is, almost always, identical: rising images, posturing nudes—but, at a bound, the natural act is effaced, as denuded of interest, as too brief, as provoking only a too well known commotion, a cry of banality; and, at a stroke, an impulse toward a preternatural debauchery, a plea for those convulsions which elude the flesh, rebounding into a spasmic beyond, become manifest. The infamy of the soul is aggravated, if one will, but it is, at the same time, refined, ennobled by the thought which mingles with it, an ideal of superhuman weaknesses and of new sins to commit.

In this process of spiritualizing ordure, a real loss of phosphorus takes place in the brain; and if, during this unquiet state of soul, in which the soul suggests to itself, and for itself alone, these overheated visions of the senses, an element of reality happens to intrude, if a flesh-and-blood woman happens to come upon the scene, then the man, waked from his dream, is left embarrassed; he becomes almost frigid; he experi-

ences, in any case, after a real pollution, an atrocious disillusionment and distress.

This strange attraction toward carnal complications, this wallowing in filth for filth's sake, this rutting which takes place wholly inside the soul, and without the body's being consulted or mixing in, this livid and limited impulsion, which has, in short, none but the most distant relations with the genetic function—all these things remain singularly mysterious, when one stops to think of them.

Erethism of the brain, says science; and if this state persists and becomes exasperated, provoking certain disorders in the organism, she pronounces the word "mental hysteria" and prescribes emollients, lupulin and camphor, potassium-bromide and douches.

As to the causes themselves, which produce these troubles, she remains, of necessity, hesitant; as with the terrible maladies of the nerves, she is ignorant of the incitements which lead to these disorders and convulsions. She simply surveys the parade of symptoms and exorcises or retards those symptoms; but she is unable, in any event, actually to explain the turbulent nature of these sickly thoughts.

The Church, on the other hand, finds herself here in her own element; she recognizes the sinuous bestirrings of ancient sin. This mental hysteria she calls a morose Delectation, and she defines it: "The enjoyment of evil, presented as present by the imagination, without desire to commit it." And from the point of view of moral responsibility, she regards this as be-

ing as dangerous as the act of commission itself, and classifies the experience, unhesitatingly, in the category of mortal sins.

She sees, in this mental onanism, the insidious appeals of the Lowest. As a remedy, she has nothing to offer but prayers and obsecrations; at need, she will have recourse once more to relics, and she will even brandish the rusty arm of exorcism. Persuaded of the virtue of the Sacraments, her great soul-practitioners confine themselves to obliging those attainted with this evil to communicate frequently, awaiting the patient's deliverance at the Holy Table.

In short, this phenomenon is clear to Catholics and profoundly obscure to materialists, inept at discovering in the brain the mechanism of that soul which they look upon as a function of the nervous system, endowing the latter alone with motive power.

In art, this mental hysteria, or morose delectation, is forced to translate itself into works which shall fix the images it has created. It finds there its spiritual exhaust, the only one possible, since a physical exhaust is, as I have said, the surest means of destroying art.

It is, accordingly, to this special state of soul that we may attribute those sensual neighings to be found in the writings and paintings of true artists.

In the hands of inferiors or of parasites, in love with coarse jests, this barren erethism, if one may call it that, has led to many abject and nonsensical works. Directed and regulated by masters, the same force

DOWN STREAM

has produced those great works of lubricity which slumber in the "lower regions" of libraries, in secret boxes and hidden cases.

It is of these latter alone that I would speak. Some, among them the most celebrated, those to be found in the secret museums of antiquity and the free works of Julio Romano, Marcantonio and Carraccio, for example, are, it must be admitted, among the most mediocre. And if we are to admit that, in the sixteenth century, the Dutch painter, Torrentius, was a man of genius, how are we to verify the assertion, since all his pictures were burned in the place de Grève, when he himself, after having been subjected to torture, was exiled as an Adamite?

On the other hand, the prints of Rembrandt are heavy, without that piercing flavor which certain priapic pictures possess; and so, I shall not pause over them. I shall also pass over in silence the damaged gentilities of the last century. Basically, that epoch eroticized furniture in a charming fashion, injected an aphrodisiac into the trades of upholstery and cabinet-making and triumphed in the environs of art; but in the field of painting proper, the best it could discover was an intrusive lackadaisicalness, a refinement of the boudoir and a teasing *décor* of the amber-impregnated bath. Putting aside the trash painted by the Fragonards and the Bouchers, we arrive, if we follow the line of descent, at the senile frivolities of the Badouins and the Carêmes, whose works were merely licentious and pretty, dishonoring, by the

baseness of their *sous-entendus*, by the pettiness of their vision, the great biblical vice of Lust.

Neglecting also Gavarni's ridiculous scenes of Intimate Life, the libertinisms of Deveria and the curtailed vignettes of the gentle Tassaert, I shall only pause with Rowlandson and the Japanese, before coming to a definite stand-still with M. Rops, whose art I would endeavor to define.

Rowlandson treated his subjects with a ferocious humor, a brimming raillery, a mad gayety. His heroes are, in large part, hussars, cutting the wind with their breeches down and frankly raping girls, who are astonished at such a windfall, and who writhe in an abandonment of joy. In one of his colored plates, there is a surprising shindy of crowds in heat: in the public square, a naked acrobat with a belly like a pumpkin is breaking himself in two, by leaning backward in a circle, to the sound of an organ; case-ments open; a Turk, seated tailor-fashion, is smoking his pipe with his paunch to the air; an old marquis, with a sword across his naked loins, is preceded by a group of scarlet and spindling forms, while a hussar of the battery does away with himself, a doctor of the Sorbonne looks on, dumfounded and motionless, and a woman, on the head of a panting man, draws up her petticoats and clambers up to the windows. There is, amid an incoherent realism, the open-breasted gayety of a sailor's wedding, a heavy laugh, which accentuates the comic gait of the old savant, deprived

of his laurels, and gives him an ill-tempered mouth and spiteful, begging eyes.

This ventripotent and massive joy, which is, yet, given a certain refinement in Rowlandson, is frequently, as in the biting plates of Hogarth, trained upon a scene that has been justly observed in its ridiculous episodes, its clownish aspects. Of this sort is one of his other colored prints, the Miser.

In a closed room, an old wretch, in a rose-colored cap, is seated near a strong-box. There are two girls, one of whom, seated on the edge of the bed, with her chemise raised up, is splaying herself; the other is striving to put life into the old man, whose breeches are down. In one hand, the latter holds a sack of crowns, while with the other he scratches his forehead, computing, with a lamentable smile, the price demanded by the girls, torn between the appeals of avarice and his distressfully lecherous inclinations.

The hesitation of the man, the bantering and crafty look of the women, who, fascinated by the protuberances and the clinking of the sack, almost forget to watch the stale libertine-stew which they are preparing for the old fellow, are truly rendered, with a scoffing *bonhomie*, a droll sagacity, and with so much skill and verve that the obscene aspect disappears and a scene of manners alone is left, with its detailed physiognomies, over which pass the ardent reflections of thwarted vices.

The woman, fat and pretty, endowed with the rustic temptation of healthy flesh, the woman with a

mincing air, at once grave and cunning, with that joyous skin which Rowlandson loves, makes her appearance in these plates, as in others of the same sort, in which hussars lecher, monks throw nuns to the ground or musicians, half-nude, with a bow in the wind, beat time, as with a metronome, to the lubricious measure, puffing, with swollen cheeks, on instruments in the form of brass pavilions.

But, it must be admitted, however desirable she may be, Rowlandson's woman is altogether animal, without any interesting complications of the senses. In short, he has given us a fornicating machine, a substantial and sanitary beast, rather than the terrible she-faun of Lust. His men are churls with the loins of street-porters; his women are vivandières, with the cruppers of draught-mares. They are such creatures as sometimes spring from Rubens' brush, and who, when the need presses them, unburden themselves. —That is all there is to it.

With the Japanese, the point of view changes. This hilariously lewd and somewhat vile attitude toward the flesh, this absurd gayety, which, in my opinion, when brought to bear upon such themes, detracts from Rowlandson's free work, has disappeared and the contrary is in evidence. There is, in the Japanese sketch-books, an affirmation of grief.

With the Japanese, carnal commerce appears to disrupt the nervous system, traversing with fulgurations the body's bristling members, stretched to the breaking point; it tortures the couples who indulge

DOWN STREAM

in it, shriveling their fists and contorting, as with an electric current, their quivering legs, while the very toes of their feet writhe in anguish.

Their women, with indolent flesh, white as emphysemas, agonize upon their backs, their eyes closed, their teeth clenched in the blood of their lips. Their bellies, frightfully split, yawn like a caruncular wound, while the men, in death-throes upon their backs, rear inconceivable *phalli*, terminating in parasols, with tubular swellings and trenched with veins. Tangled in impossible poses, they all lie like cadavers whose bones have been broken by powerful strap-padoes.

The finest print I know of this sort is a frightful one. It depicts a Japanese woman covered by an octopus. With its tentacles, the horrible beast sucks the ends of her breasts and rummages over her mouth, while the head is drinking from the lower parts. The almost superhuman expression of anguish and of grief which convulses this long sparrow-like figure, with a busked nose and, at the same time, an hysteric joy filtering down over her forehead, while her eyes, all the while, are closed as in death, is admirable!

The Japanese have, then, redeemed by suffering that bibulous, whole-hearted and galloping Lust which is to be found in the English painter; but here, still, there is nothing but anecdotes, nothing in the way of works of art, elevated by a general idea and given a spiritual and sustaining stock.

In these plates, there is no concept to coördinate and condense that Lust which fills, even, the Bible, which rears its head in the first pages, under the tree of Eden, and which emerges again at the end of the Book, when, evoked by the angel with the seven vials, it rises in its brazen and purple accoutrements as the sovereign Wanton, viewed by St. John.

Deified by Paganism, which worshiped it in the various incarnations of its Venuses and its Priapi, Lust, having later become a Christian sin, was symbolized in the flesh-eating dance of Herodiade. Then it abandoned to the ancient Harrower of sins, as tillable land, the lost souls of the saints, began torturing solitaries in their Theban deserts and, for centuries, corrupted the resolute modesty of the cloister.

It was it, also, which determined the migrations of tribes and the wiping out of peoples, and which erected, upon its piles of phalli, the tremulous framework of history. It is it which, at the present time, holds the world in its hand, and which alone is able to contend against that other force of the age—money, a force which, in the hands of the most unfeeling, trembles at the flame of the flesh!

The mechanism of this jack-screw of the carnal lump, this lever of souls, is worth studying; it is worth while to endeavor to lay bare that mechanism, to demonstrate its methods of working and to divulge its causes; it is worth while to attempt, so to speak, a catholic résumé of it, in ardently melancholy images; it is worth while to essay the substitution, from

the plastic point of view, of a new Satan, a novel Demon, for the allegoric deities of Paganism.

Retarded by the child's play of poses, which merely reveal that which a secular prudishness forbids to be seen, finding a stupid pleasure in ingenious and vulgar details, painting, for long, did not seem to recognize the fact that, like humanity of which it is the offspring, like the earth itself, it could only gravitate between the heaven and the hell of art. It did not take into account the fact that, in order to be super-shrill every work of art must be either mystic or satanic, and that, with the exception of these two extremes, there is only an art which may be said to be of the temperate zone, of purgatory, having been inspired by human subjects which are more or less contemptible.

Purity has inspired incomparable canvases; it has sublimated the talents of the great Christian painters, the Fra-Angelicos and the Grünwalds, the Roger Van Der Weydens and the Memlincs. But it has been dead since the Middle Ages; it is, thenceforward, something inaccessible in art—just as is that divine sentiment from which it springs—for a generation deprived of all faith.

Lust, for its part, has given birth in the past to no work that was really strong. It has been necessary to come down to our own time, in order to find an artist who has thought of really exploring those antarctic regions which were previously unknown to art. Adopting the old concept of the Middle Ages,

to the effect that man constantly fluctuates between Good and Evil, that he is engaged in a constant struggle between God and the Devil, between a Purity which is of the divine essence and a Lust that is of the Demon himself, M. Felicien Rops, with the soul of a primitive working against the grain, has accomplished, inversely, the task of a Memlinc. He has penetrated satanism and summed it up in a series of plates which are, as it were, inventions, symbols, a nervous and incisive, a ferocious and distressed, a truly unique art.

But, it must be stated, M. Rops has not attained, at a single stroke, this Synthesis of Evil. In the clever frontispieces which he engraved for the licentious works re-issued by Poulet-Malassis at Brussels, he revealed simply, a gift of impious banter, a bizaare and lively imagination.

With a mind that is sometimes too emphatic, he sometimes achieves elegant and beribboned plates like those of the 18th century—such as the eau-forte which precedes the "*Théâtre Gaillard*" or the *Point de Lendemain*" of Vivant Denon—while at other times, he expresses himself in allegories that are wholly personal, with a freedom that is absolutely fascinating. Among the former, one might cite his eaux-fortes of the "*Parnasse Satyrique*," among them, the one in which flocks of minute women and tiny bacchantes are climbing up the rigid joy-prong of a Termes, whose beard is bristling with mirth, while, with his kind, fatherly eyes, he contemplates one of

the women striding forlornly the summit of his formidable member, stretching out her arms in a swoon and crying mercy, while her companions are clinging noisily from his two heavy spheres. Or take this other one, depicting the foregoing scene reversed: a troop of little Egyptians are assaulting a female faun without arms, her head crowned with vine-leaves, her ears pointed and her breasts heavy. She also is enjoying herself and smiles, maternally and lasciviously, upon these little goat-footed satyrs, who take her by the throat, swarm over her belly, forrage in her navel and creep into the gaping pod of her womb. But one of the most ingenious and most vehement works of this series is the one which precedes the little volume of the "*Joyeusetés du Vidame de la Braguette*" of the poor Glatigny.

Picture a good old roysterer of Flanders, seated with his belly to the breeze, the flap of his trousers down; he is hilarious to the point of tears and choking with exuberance, while a swarm of tiny creatures shoots over his prodigious and nude member, which rises like a Pharos, with its base plunged in a thick coppice.

They are something unheard of, these nymphomaniac dwarfs! Never before had this madness of rutting cats been rendered with so great a feeling for the warm flesh or with so great a degree of passion! These shriveled beings cling with their hands from tufts, climb the main-mast, twist the wallets, hoist themselves on each other's shoulders, devour each

other and finally, fall headlong in dying clusters. All this comes from a vivacious, deep-seated, sure-footed sense of design. In these plates, the Lingam gives rise to the strangest and most unforeseen forms imaginable. In repose, as in the frontispiece to the "*Dictionnaire érotique*" of Delvau, it is like a butterfly with a human face, the nose being outlined by the flaccid shaft, the eyes situated up above, under the fleece, while the cheeks are imitated by the two bags. In action, as in the eau-forte of Vidame, it molts into a figurine, a nose and mouth are sculptured out, and the summit turns into a Turkish turban, surmounted by a liquid aigret.

At the same time that he was illustrating this series of volumes, *Partout et nulle part*, *S. L. N. D.*, *A Eleuthéropolis ou à Lampsaque*, etc., and while he was brightening, with his gay engravings, the heavy prose of the late Delvau, M. Rops was creating a type of woman whom we shall find reappearing, in derivatory forms, in his other work: the absinthe-drinker, who, besotted and famishing, becomes increasingly menacing and voracious, with her empty and frozen, her hard and vulgar face, with her limpid eyes, possessed of that cruel, fixed look of the low woman, with her mouth a little too large and curling to the right and with a short and regular nose.

This type of cupidinous and insatiable she-wolf appears, in modified form, in a number of his plates. Of these, one may be cited in his "Woman Seated on a Fur," which was not inserted in the volume for

DOWN STREAM

which it was intended, "*Les Rimes de Joie*" of M. Théodore Hannon, a poet of talent, who, without the excuse of misery, foundered at Brussels in the sewer of end-of-the-year revues and the nauseating stews of the lower-grade press.

Like those works in which M. Rodin frequently transposes the same motive in his sculptures, whereas M. Rops usually gives us the authentic and brutal reality, I care less for these. To tell the truth, in his peasants, the influence of Millet is to be felt; and when he attacks the woman in clothes, the modern woman, the contemporary being, the true prostitute, his hand appears to slacken, and he does not attain that power of reality in transcribing the irruptions of life, that desolating cry, of the prodigious Degas. I prefer to him here, also, I must confess, M. Forain, whose Parisian sense is sure; but as soon as he allegorizes and synthesizes woman, as soon as he lifts her from a real milieu, M. Rops becomes, at once, inimitable.

In this genre should be noted the adorable creature which, with certain variations, he has three times reproduced; in the epilogue to the "*Sonnet du Docteur*," and in the publication of Mlle. Douce and that of Mme. Dulac.

We see her in profile, plump, clad in a flowered hat, with a chemise that reveals her naked breasts, gloved to the biceps in long black gloves, shod in striped silk stockings. With her nose, regular in shape but a little common, her eyes, in which sparkles

the brisk glow of a nuptial night, and her drawn and ill-tempered mouth, she is irresistible. In these plates, in which light loves flutter pantingly among the vine-leaves, she is like a sentinel, posted on the outskirts of the lubricious camp. She evokes, for a man, the idea of illicit caresses and unseasonable kisses. She suggests, in herself, a reflex of paroxysms, comic in their intensity.

But this *eau-forte*, like a number of others, represents, so far as the art of M. Rops is concerned, merely a whimsical print. All those which I have reviewed are, simply, ironic and scabrous, some of them almost blustering in their heartiness.

We come now to speak of his art proper, from which the woman rises, demoniac and terrible, treated by a talent that is amplified or condensed, in accordance with the appearance, in a crucible of Catholic ideas, of that concept of satanism of which I have spoken.

Of necessity, M. Rops was forced to embody the idea of Possession in the form of woman; and in doing so, he was in accord with the Fathers of the Church, with the whole spirit of the Middle Ages and with Antiquity itself; for in speaking of the criminal copulations of magic, Quintilian wrote: "The presumption is very great that the woman is a sorceress." The fact that the woman was a sorceress was, of itself, sufficient to contaminate the man who approached her. "Satan, by means of women, draws men in his tow" is the testimony of Bodin, paraphrasing the

opinion of the Middle Ages, which is to be found set forth in all the declarations of its exorcists, to the effect that there were fifty sorceresses, or demoniacal women, for every man.

Moreover, whether one accepts or rejects the theory of satanism, does not the same situation prevail today? Is not the man led into misdemeanors and crimes by the woman, who is, herself, almost always, an abandoned creature? She is, in short, the great vase of iniquities and of crimes, the charnel-house of miseries and of shames, the true sponsor for those ambassadors who are sent into our souls as the agents of all the vices.

One might also add, without stepping beyond the circle traced by Catholics, that the Demon was in the habit of incarnating himself in the form of woman and of copulating, in that form, with men, at night. He became, then, the Succubus, or Ephialtes. M. Rops has, thus, merely followed the immutable tradition of the centuries, when, in his satanic works, he chooses for principal character woman, woman, bewitched by the Devil and, in her turn, empoisoning the man who touches her.

Otherwise, he would have had to introduce, into redoubtable scenes he conceives, the Devil himself.

During the middle Ages, one fact is to be noted, and that is that all the painters represented the Evil One under forms horrible or grotesque, but never under those revealed in the ordinary procedure of the witches' sabbath.

On this point, documents abound, and they are in agreement. Apart from certain instances in which this Middleman of Souls appears with unaccustomed features and in novel costumes,—to Saint Romuald, for example, as a vulture; to Saint Robert as a grazier; to Evagrius as a puffing clerk; and to still others under varied disguises, or under the appearance of fantastic animals of one sort or another—with these exceptions, he is always to be seen, when he appears as a beast, in the form of a goat, a dog or a soot-colored cat, while, appearing as a man, his lineaments are very clearly specified.

“He was a big and very black man, clad wholly in black and always booted and spurred.” (Bodin: *De la Démonomanie*).

“When he takes the human form, the devil is black, filthy, stinking and formidable, or at least, of a dark, brown and dirty face; his nose is either deformedly flat or enormously aquiline, his mouth deep-gaping, his eyes deep-sunken and very sparkling . . .” (Del Rio: *Controverses magiques*).

“He is long, black, with a voice inarticulate and cracked, but blustering and terrible . . . his hair is tangled . . . he has a goat’s beard . . .” (Gorres: *Mystique diabolique*).

Here, M. Rops has absolutely broken with tradition. His Prince of Darkness is no longer either the black knight or the goat which used to terrify the naïve souls of the ancients; such a satan would impress us as having just stepped out of a surprise-box,

if he were to make his appearance before us today, in such apparel or under such a mask. M. Rops' satan is thoroughly modern; he is a gentleman in black, a peasant, an unwashed Prudhomme, and on those occasions on which he does preserve his hiaratic form, he borrows that form, most often, from the Priapi and the Termes, the Satyrs and the Fauns, who, in accordance with the opinion of the doctors of demonology, the Lancres and the Bodins, the Sinistraris and the Del Rios, the Sprengers and the Gorres, are none other than troops of demons or evil spirits.

Such are the forms we find in M. Rops' Satanics. This series, which was not completed, includes five plates treated in mellow varnish; but one might add to these, as being included in the same order of ideas, certain of those eaux-fortes which illustrate the "*Diaboliques*" of Barbey d'Aurevilly and a few others which serve as preliminaries to the lucubrations of M. Peladan.

The first of his Satanics, the "Satan Sowing the Tares," is conceived thus:

By night, above sleeping Paris, an immense sower fills the skies; his feet, laden with heavy clogs, rest upon the roofs of the Right Bank and the summits of the towers of Nôtre-Dame. Under the arch formed by his skinny legs, the Seine rolls like a river of rice-water, glassing the moon, the disk of which is ex-coriated by the reek of the clouds. With one arm, Satan lifts up his apron, in which the larvae of women are swarming, while with the other, he mows the

firmament with a gesture that flings down, furiously, the seeds of evil over the mute city.

Clad as a peasant, with a wide-brimmed hat, he has a bony face with eyes of glowing coals, while his lips are spread in an atrociously sardonic grimace. His flowing hair and long beard reveal, by their cut, an American origin, while the form of his hat is reminiscent, in certain details of its flaps and folds, of the almost Breton head-gear of some of the Quakers.

It would seem that he has passed through that new world, which, with its bath of greedy hypocrisy, has acted as a rejuvenating tonic on the vices of old Europe.

In scrutinizing this horrible face, we discern the cold and deliberate jubilation of the Devil, who knows with what infamous virtues the larvae that swarm from his hands are endowed. He knows, also, that the harvest is sure, and his hideous lips move in a susurrus of inverse supplications, inviting his sluggish Rival to bless these woes of the earth and to consecrate the formidable crop of crimes which is to spring from this seed.

This plate is truly eloquent, truly superb. This enormous Husbandman, whose clogged heel fills the entire surface of the top of one tower, whose skeleton-like legs form an immense ogive above the microscopic city which stretches beneath them, the whole diluted in the infinity of night, is outlined with a draughtsmanship that is ample and yet self-contained, at once concise and supple.

DOWN STREAM

From the point of view of animating ideas, one might compare with this print the one entitled "Satan Sowing Monsters," which shows us a Satan in the night, rearing one arm and, with the other, inundating space with his seed.

The second Satanic, "The Abduction," shows us a sorceress carried away nude through the air upon a broomstick which the Devil holds. Lying upon her back, she is being carried headlong through space, until her master sets her down in those solitary regions where sounds the noise of the witches' sabbath.

And she, in the meanwhile, indulges in long reveries, evoking those monstrous memories which the demonographers have noted.

One thinks, upon viewing this departure for the sabbath, of those extracts of mandragora, those henbanes and juices of the solanaceae with which women used to make their bodies glisten; one thinks of those philtres with which they intoxicated themselves, philtres composed, according to Del Rio, "of menstrual blood, of sperm, of the brain of the cat or of the ass's foal, of the belly of the hyena, of the genital parts of wolves and, above all, of the hippomane, which flows from the parts of mares when they are in heat." Then, following this broomstick-ride through the clouds, comes the descent into the glade, when the Devil, under the form of a Satyr or a Goat, extends his black and hairy rump to be kissed, while all about, children are promenading toads around the ponds, for, says Lancre, "Satan keeps them re-

moved from the scene from fear of losing them forever through the sight of such things." And then, the black mass is celebrated upon the naked buttocks of a woman; and the company proceed to banquet, cramming themselves with human soup and with infant's flesh, the blood of which is sucked through the navel or the neck, and bones are crunched which, cooked with certain herbs and kept for a year back, have become as soft as radishes. Instead of with salt, which prevents corruption, their bread is made from rust-eaten ears, fermenting with the germs of disease and death; the wine is a furious vintage, made from vines grown in the warm cinders of volcanoes. Blasphemies are heard on all sides, as the congregation communes with the black host, bearing the imprint of a goat. Torches are extinguished, and men and women turn upon each other and copulate; each endeavors to plunge into an illicit receptacle and, for purposes of incest, seeks to meet up with his own daughter or his mother, doing his best to render them pregnant, so that he may be able, at a forthcoming sabbath, to devour the offspring born of these hideous works of the flesh!

These proceedings were marked by certain ardent joys now lost to us and by certain pains impossible to recapture in our time. M. Rops has understood all this, and in certain of his plates, he has terribly expressed these excesses of mirth and suffering.

One of these, "The Sacrifice," truly achieves the terrifying. Upon an altar, a nude woman is stretched,

her legs spread apart; above her is an unspeakable being, his back composed of the skeleton of a horse's head, with yawning holes for eyes and with two long teeth at the end of his snout, which has dropped down to take the place of his loins; this figure is topped by a dark head, detached upon a troubled sky, against the background of a crescent moon. His skinny arms form a pair of handles on the two sides of his body, which terminates, minus a rump, in a sort of thyrsus, in a sort of double gimlet, which is being plunged into the lower-belly of the woman, pinning her to the altar-stone, while she cries out in an abandonment of horror and of joy!

The impression that is to be gotten from this terrifying page is a unique one. This demon, with so strange a face, pitiless and immobile, has, in a manner, been forsaken there upon his victim, whose death-rattle he does not hear. His head, cut off by a horn of the moon, only the misty nape of the neck being visible, is, dreamily, far from the earth, while, all the time, the festooned pale of his genital parts is bathed in waves of blood. It is, at once, terrifying and grandiloquent, a bitter symbolism of Lust issuing in death, of Possession desperately willed, which, like every wish that is realized, is at once expiated.

In another one, "The Idol," the woman also acquires her god, a still frightful Satan, a sort of stone-sheathed Hermes, with a smiling and lascivious face, an ignobly low forehead, a broken nose and an oozy, hairy goat's beard. He stands there, upright

in his hemisphere of marble, fixed in the form of a phallus, the base of which is hermaphroditized between two goat's feet; while to the right, an elephant is exciting himself with his trunk.

The woman has leaped upon this monster and is embracing it, passionately, remaining ferociously suspended from the belly that pierces her own, regarding her abominable Lover with strident eyes, the mirth of which is terror-inspiring.

This figure is truly magnificent. Never before did the violence of the flesh thus leap forth from a work of art; never before did the expression of infinity and of ecstasy so decompose, even while it sublimated, a face. We have, here, a sort of diabolic Theresa, a satanized saint in prayer, in this copulating creature, awaiting the supreme moment which shall speedily change into an unforgettable deception; for all the documents assure us that the woman who makes a pact with the Devil experiences, at the final moment, an indescribable horror, in the form of a gush of ice, and that she falls, at once, into an intense and inexpressible exhaustion.

The last plate is entitled "Calvary." Here we have the Evil One, reared, in place of the Christ, upon the infamous gibbet, the Evil One sniggering forth from a face in which there is something of an old peasant, of the Yankee and, above all, of the Faun, a bestial, vinous, unclean Satan, with his chops in the form of a money-box and teeth like those of a walrus. He is smiling, with his *mentula* in the air, while with his

DOWN STREAM

feet, which have come unfastened, he reaches out and seizes the hair of a nude woman, standing upright in front of him. Slowly, he strangles her, with the network of her own hair, until, terrified, with outstretched arms, she drops, agonized, into a nervous spasm, a spasm of atrocious joy.

The derisive fiction of this scene, this sacrilege of the cross, become an instrument of joy, the defilement of this Magdalen, standing in ecstasy before the nudity of this Christ, all this uterine passion, lighted by a row of candles, the flames of which lap the darkness like white lancets—all this is truly demoniac, truly the offspring of the ancient sabbaths, which, if they no longer, completely and really, exist, are, nevertheless, celebrated at certain moments, in the putrified souls of each one of us.

Here again, painter of the feminine nude that he is, M. Rops has seized upon the stern and ardent flesh and petrified it, writhing in its feverish excesses; he has revealed, in short, the preternatural aspect of those superannuated physiognomies, bursting forth into transports so vehement that the expression of their features pursues you to the point of anguish.

It is here, in fact, that the personality of these plates is to be encountered. A painter of mere talent would, perhaps, have rendered these carnal transports, these ferocious ruttings, by imitating, after nature, the ardent faces of satyriasis and nymphomaniacs; he would have created, that is to say, a material work, confined to aberrations of the genesic sense, and

without anything beyond this; but I do not know, at the present time, any other who could, as M. Rops has done, have depicted with lightening-like strokes the maddened soul of bewitched womankind, possessed and flecked, in all her ideas, by the very genius of Evil.

One might compare with these Satanics certain *eauxfortes*, among them the frontispiece of "*Curieuse*," which represents a woman being approached by a Termes, twining her arms about his neck, gazing upon him with devouring eyes and scrutinizing the smile that plays over his frightful chops, a sister, apparently, to the one, in the "Satanics," who leaps and emprongs herself upon a sneering Hermes. Another one also is admirable, the one bearing the inscription, "*In lombis Diaboli virtus*," which pictures Love under the image of Death. Viewed from the rear her cranium crowned with roses, Death is raising her palpitating wings over her abysmal back; a corset of black silk binds her extravagantly slender figure, which widens out below into buttocks of living flesh. With one hand, she holds the bow of the ancient Eros, which dangles against her legs, while with the other, she rears aloft, like the bloody head of the Baptist, the decapitated skull of Hamlet. This Salome of the sepulchre is a frightful being. Through the grating of her back, her spinal column and a whole flora of ribs and vertebrae are to be perceived, like dead branches, descending into the double basin of her bulging haunches, while, viewed, from the wings,

DOWN STREAM

the sphere of a powerful gullet is flowering upon the disinterred facade of this hollow carcass.

Below, to complete the imagistic symbolism, the bony framework of this rabbit's back exhibits anastomosed rings, despoiled of flesh; and this skeleton of the renal regions, to which the artist has added long wings, thus comes to evoke the idea of an immense nocturnal butterfly, or the snout of some unknown, winged and feline beast, with a head set off by ringed ears, represented by the flesh-stripped bones of the hips.

This Death, on which only the influent parts are left alive, only those parts propitious to the follies of man, we shall find scattered through the work of M. Rops. In certain plates, in which, as always, she is associated with the idea of Lust, she is to be seen flying, for her own amusement, little Cupids with flat-nosed faces, or else, she resumes her true form and is shown coming out alive from a coffin, as in the water-color eau-forte which is to be seen at the beginning of the "*Vice supreme*." There, she is still more hideous. Triggered out in furbelows and lifting up her train with a hand of gloved ossicles, she swoons and minces horribly beside a decapitated man, who, holding his own death's head under his arm, is parading about, constellated with decorations, in ballroom costume.

Thus, like the painters of the Middle Ages, whom the figure of death haunted, M. Rops approaches this figure and, fascinated, steps all around it; and his art sways, deviates and bedizens itself out in this Baude-

lairean sentiment, which appears to be the last expression of Catholic art in the hands of moderns.

Thus, he alone was fitted to illustrate those Diabolics which an artist like Barbey d'Aurevilly, deeply-rootedly Christian, was alone fitted to write.

Some of these illustrations are authentic works of figurative synthesis and plastic symbolism. I am not speaking here, it is understood, of those *eaux-fortes* which were so wretchedly reproduced to meet the demands of the publisher Lemerre, but rather of originals, in mellow varnish, in which the artist has been able, by liberating himself from the minutiae of a pocket-format, to expend his labors upon valid plates.

To cite but two of the most curious examples, here, first of all, are two epilogues which treat of the same subject, "Prostitution and Madness Ruling the World."

In one of them, a woman with the feet of a nanny-goat, upright upon one of the poles of the earth, is emerging from a star-sown night. Nude to the thighs, she has a head that is ugly, and yet pretty, and she smiles, with the provocative grace of a drunken tomboy, widens her turbulent eyes and opens her mouth to cry forth to heaven barroom ordures, while, with a drunken gesture, she plays with her chignon. She finds pasturage on the sidewalk and in the bagnio, evoking the picture of the hardened lady who plays with the shortsword in the wastelands. Behind her, a goat-footed Folly, with the features of an old woman,

DOWN STREAM

slips the other's arms under her own, reveals her belly and peeps up under the belled and pointed bonnet, with the paternal and covetous smile of the procuress and the street-walker.

In the other, upon the same pole, against a lighter sky, a woman is, likewise, standing erect; but it is no longer the blonde head of the *voyoute*; it is a tall and strongly built brunette, who lifts her undone hair, smiles insolently with her large mouth and raises up the chemise which covers her. This is the beauty of the first-class houses; she is from a less eccentric suburb, of a saner flesh and instincts less noisy and less treacherous. Behind her also, Madness cranes her neck and smiles, artfully and maternally, as she stands there on her goat's feet.

This brunette does not beard God like the blonde, who plays the smart-aleck in the face of heaven; she smiles, silently, but does not challenge the celestial citizenry nor bawl, open-mouthed, at the stars.

Less general in theme is that other plate which illustrates the wild tale of "*Bonheur dans le crime*." Upon a pedestal on which reposes, amid her ringlets of serpents, the pale visage of Medusa, a homicidal pair are entwined, while Death, disinterred and in her winding-sheet, drags herself along on her knees, crying imprecations and imploring vengeance on the Gorgon, who smiles down with her impassive lips and white eyes.

One might mention also the eau-forte, "Under the Whist Table," with its thin and lank figure of a

woman, treading upon a foetus and gazing, fixedly, straight in front of her, with a bony-templed head, round and sunken eyes and an invisible mouth which, veiled by ten fingers lifted in front of it, is like the teeth of corpses and appears to be imitating the frightful laughter of the dead.

But the "Sphinx," which precedes the text of the book, and which is one of M. Rops' most literary efforts, falls particularly into the category of symbolic plates, with which I am here concerned. Its design is as follows:

Upon an elongated Sphinx, in the precise hieratic attitude, with hard and rigid breasts, paws outstretched in front, haunches bent under and head erect, a nude woman creeps, encircles the neck of the beast, hoists herself to its ear and, in a low whisper, implores it to reveal to her, at last, the supernatural secret of undreamed of joys and novel sins. Vicious and wheedling, she rubs her flesh against the granite of the monster, in the attempt to seduce it, offering herself to it, as to a man from whom she would like to uproot money; she remains a prostitute, even when transported to this unworldly scene, even when exalted by this ineluctable nudity, the nudity of a goddess or of Eve.

While she embraces, whisperingly, the neck of the immobile sphynx, Satan, in black, a monocle in his eye, seated upon the two wings which rise like hollow crescents over the monster's back, is listening atten-

tively to this avowal of a delirious hope, a hope obsessing the soul of this creature, a soul over which his power is certain.

And yet, it would seem that he himself has need to sound the depths of that inscrutable pit, of which he has not yet found the bottom. This is the true civilized Satan of this end-of-the-century, a gentleman, silent and proper, forbearing and tenacious. He is imperfect, worn-out, old. Obligated now to give an account of himself, he finds he no longer possesses the colossal fascination of his prime. He must eaves-drop now; he is no longer on the inside, and no longer displays, it may be, in his pursuit of souls, anything beyond the limited faculties of a man.

One might go on talking about this numerous series of plates, for these engravings, achieved without any concern for a glory of the boulevards, on the part of an artist who dwells far apart from the fickle hurrahs of crowds, are nothing less than immense. A catalogue edited by M. Ramiro lists, in addition to the lithographs, more than six hundred items, but the details of these would arouse sensations no different from those evoked by the works cited, which should be sufficient to give an idea of M. Rops' temperament.

One might, I believe, after a few final explanations, sum up thus the impulse which he brings to art:

Unlike his confrères, almost all of whom would seem to have been born in stables or in basements, and whose education has been chiefly acquired in parochial schools and similar places, M. Rops, exempt

from workingman or peasant origins and endowed with an education wholly literary, is the only one who, among the crowd of crayonists, has displayed any aptitude at formulating the syntheses of the frontispiece, an art of which he remains the unique master; he is, above all, the only one big enough to realize a work of art which shall be a résumé of the passive side of that eternal monster, Vice.

Initiated in these matters, which are now overlooked, by Baudelaire and by Barbey d'Aurevilly, his predecessors in the paths of Satanism, he has explored these regions to their furthest confines, and, in a wholly different art, has been the one wholly to make known the diabolic amplitude of the carnal passions.

He has restored to Lust, so sillily restricted to the field of anecdote, so basely materialized by some, its mysterious omnipotence. He has replaced it, religiously, in that infernal frame within which it properly moves; and for this very reason, he has not created obscene and practical works, but works that are really Catholic, flaming and terrible.

He has not limited himself, like his predecessors, to rendering the passionate attitudes of bodies; he has given us, gushing forth from flesh in ignition, the sorrows of fever-excited souls and the joys of warped minds. He has painted demoniac ecstasy as others have painted mystic propulsion. Far removed from his century, an age in which materialistic art sees nothing but hysterics eaten up by their ovaries or nymphomaniacs with brains in the region of their bellies, he

DOWN STREAM

has celebrated, not the contemporary woman, not the Parisienne, whose lackadaisical graces and intrusive attire are lacking in appeal to him, but rather, Woman, essential and beyond all time, the nude and poisonous Beast, the Mercenary of Darkness and the absolute Handmaiden of the Devil.

He has, in a word, celebrated that spirituality of Lust which is Satanism; he has painted, in imperfectible pages, the supernatural side of perversity, that heaven-and-hell which lies beyond all Evil.

PREFACE

To

"Against the Grain"

A Rebours

WRITTEN TWENTY YEARS AFTER THE NOVEL





PREFACE



AM INCLINED to think that all men of letters must be like myself, in that they never reread their own works after publication. Nothing, in truth, is more disillusioning, more of a trial, than to look back, after a number of years, on the phrases which one has written. Those phrases appear, in a manner, to have settled at the bottom of the book; and most times, books are not like wines, which grow better as they grow older, but once despoiled by age, their chapters evaporate, and the bouquet of the whole vanishes.

I have had this impression regarding certain flagons ranged in the case labeled *A Rebours*, when I have come to unstopper them. And in a mood melancholy enough, I seek to recall, as I leaf through these pages, the state of soul in which I must have been at the moment of writing them.

Naturalism was then in full flower; but this school, which should have rendered a not-to-be-forgotten service, by setting down real characters in accurately depicted environments was condemned to mark time in wearisome repetitions.

PREFACE

It did not make sufficient provision, at least in theory, for the exceptional case. It confined itself to the portrayal of everyday life, forcing itself, under pretext of verisimilitude, to create types which should be as like as possible to the golden mean of men. This ideal was realized, in kind, in a masterpiece which has proved to be, far more than *L'Assommoir*, the paragon of naturalism. I refer to *L'Education sentimentale* of Gustave Flaubert. This novel was, for all of us of the *Soirées de Médan* group, a veritable Bible, but it afforded all too little grist. It was a finished thing, not to be undertaken again, even by Flaubert himself. We were, thus, reduced, all of us in those days, to tacking about rather aimlessly on courses that had been more or less mapped out.

Virtue being, it must be granted, an exception here below, it was, for that reason, something outside the Naturalist scheme. Not being in possession of the Catholic concept of temptation and the fall, we were ignorant of those efforts, those sufferings, of which virtue is the fruit; the heroism of a soul victorious over ambushes was a thing that eluded us. The idea had not even occurred to us of describing this struggle, with its heights and its depths, its back-thrusts and its feints, as well as those skillful reinforcements which, frequently, are to be found under way, far from the person whom the Evil One attacks, in the depths of some cloister. Virtue impressed us as being the appanage of creatures without curiosity or without sensitiveness, gifted, in any event, with little

DOWN STREAM

attractiveness, when it came to treating them from the point of view of art.

There remained the vices; but the tillable field here was a restricted one. It was limited to the territory of the Seven Capital Sins, while of these seven, a single one, that against the Sixth* Commandment of God, was, practically, the only one available.

The other vintages had been terribly exhausted, and there were few grapes left to pick. Avarice, for example, had been squeezed to the last drop by Balzac and Hello. Pride, Wrath, Covetousness had been dragged through all the publications of the Romanticists, and these subjects had, moreover, been so violently abused upon the stage that it would have required nothing short of genius to accomplish their rejuvenation in a book. As to Gluttony and Sloth, it seemed easier to incarnate them in episodic and super-numerary characters than to employ them as the leading actors, the *premières chanteuses*, of a novel of manners.

The truth is, Pride would have been one of the most magnificent of crimes to study, in its infernal ramifications of cruelty towards one's neighbor and false humility, while Gluttony, towing in its wake Lust and Sloth, and Theft, also, might have provided material for surprising excavations, if these sins had been studied with the lamp and blow-pipe of the Church, in the light of faith. But none of us were fitted for this task, and so, we found ourselves in a corner with

*What we know as the Seventh.

P R E F A C E

nothing to do but chew over that misdemeanor which is the easiest of all to decorticate, namely, the sin of Lust, under all its forms. And God knows, we did chew it over; but our carousal was a brief one. Whatever invention was brought to bear, it came to the point where the novel could be summed up in these few words: Would Monsieur So-and-So commit adultery with Madame So-and-So, or would he not? If one desired to appear distinguished and to reveal himself as a high-toned author, he introduced as protagonists, in this work of the flesh, a marquise and a count. If his ambition, on the other hand, was to be a popular writer, one in the swim, he employed a barroom lover and a prostitute. Nothing differed but the frame. This distinction still seems to me to be a valid one in the minds of readers, since I perceive that the latter have not yet had their fill of plebeian or bourgeois loves, but continue to smack their chops over the hesitations of the marquise, on her way to meet her tempter in a little mezzanine, the aspect of which varies according to the upholstery fashions of the day. Will she fall, or won't she? Such is the title of this little study in psychology. And for my part, I don't give a hang.

I must confess that whenever I open a book and come upon the eternal seduction and the not less eternal adultery, I hasten to close the volume, being in no wise desirous of learning how the idyl ends. The volume that does not contain authentic documents, the book that can teach me nothing, no longer interests me.

At the moment when *A Rebours* appeared, that is to say, in 1884, the situation was, then, as follows: Naturalism was out of breath from turning the mill-wheel in the same old circle. The sum-total of observations which each of its practitioners had been able to store up, from study of himself and others, was beginning to be exhausted. Zola, who was a good scenic artist, had come out of it all with a few canvasses that were more or less accurate; he was able to suggest, very well, the illusion of movement and of life, but his heroes were denuded of soul, swayed wholly by their impulses and their instincts, all of which simplified the labor of analysis. They moved about, accomplished certain summary acts and peopled the stage with sufficiently life-like silhouettes, which became the principal characters of his drama. His theme was the market-places, the novelty-shops, the railroads, the mines, while the human beings to be found scattered through these places played no more than the rôle of property-men and supers; but Zola was Zola, that is to say, an artist who was a trifle clumsy, but one endowed with powerful lungs and big fists.

Others of us, more concerned with an art that should be a little truer and more subtle, had come to ask ourselves if Naturalism had not reached an impasse, and if we should not soon be bumping our heads against a stone wall.

To tell the truth, these reflections did not well up in me until a good while later. I was seeking, vaguely,

PREFACE

a means of escape from a blind-alley in which I was suffocating, but I had, as yet, no determined plan, and *A Rebours*, which freed me from a form of literary creation without egress, by giving me a little air, is an absolutely unconscious work, achieved without preconceived ideas, without any reservations for the future or anything of the sort.

It had first come to me as a brief fantasy, under the form of a bizarre short story. I saw it as a kind of sequel to *A vau-l'Eau*, as an *A vau-l'Eau* transferred to another world. I pictured to myself a Monsieur Folantin who should be more cultivated, more refined, richer, and who should have discovered, in his experiments with the artificial, a counter-irritant for the disgust inspired in him by the turmoils of life and by the American manners of his time. I sketched him in profile, flying away into a dream-world, taking refuge in extravagant and fairy-like illusions, and living alone, far removed from his century, in the memories evoked by more cordial ages and surroundings not quite so vile.

But as I reflected, the subject grew, necessitating patient researches. Each chapter became the jelly of a different specialty, the sublimation of a different art; it condensed into a broth of stones, perfumes, flowers, sacred and lay literature, profane music and the plain-song.

The strange thing was that, without suspecting, at first, where it would tend, I was led by the very nature of my labors to study the Church under all its

facets. It was, in short, impossible to go back to the only decent eras humanity had known, the Middle Ages, without recognizing the fact that She held everything, that art only existed in Her and by Her. Not possessing faith, I gazed upon her rather defiantly, surprised at her size and her glory, and asking myself how it was that a religion which had impressed me as being made for children could have inspired works of art that were so marvelous.

I groped about Her for a while, divining more than I saw and building up for myself, from the odds and ends I found in the museums or in old books, an ensemble. And as today, after more extended and sure-footed investigations, I run through those pages of *A Rebours* which treat of Catholicism and religious art, I am led to remark that this diminutive panorama, painted upon the leaves of a sketch-book, is a faithful one. What I painted then was concise, it stood in need of expansion, but it was true; and I have, since, merely limited myself to enlarging and finishing my first sketches.

I could, today, with very good grace, sign those pages of *A Rebours* which have to do with the church, for they appear to me, as a matter of fact, to have been written by a Catholic.

And yet, I imagined that I was far from religion! I did not realize that from Schopenhauer, whom I admired beyond all reason, to *Ecclesiastes* and the Book of Job there was but a step. The premises of Pessimism are the same; only, when there is question

PREFACE

of a conclusion, philosophy steals away. I loved Schopenhauer's ideas upon the horror of life, the stupidity of the world and the inclemency of destiny; I love the same ideas, equally, in the Holy Books. But the observations of Schopenhauer lead to nothing; he, so to speak, leaves you flat; his aphorisms are, in short, nothing more than an herbarium of withered lamentations. The Church, on the other hand, explains origins and causes, indicates ends, offers remedies. She is not content with giving you a spiritual consultation; she treats you and cures you, whereas the German physician, after having shown you that the affection from which you are suffering is incurable, turns his back upon you with a sneer.

Yet his Pessimism is no different from that of the Scriptures, from which he has borrowed it. He has not said any more than Solomon, any more than Job, any more, even, than the *Imitation*, which summed up, long before his time, all philosophy in a single phrase: "It is, truly, a misery to live upon the earth!"

At a distance, these similarities and dissimilarities are clear, but at that period, if I perceived them, I did not pause over them. I did not feel the need of drawing any conclusion. The way opened up by Schopenhauer was navigable and of varied aspect, and I walked in it tranquilly, without wishing to know the end. At that time I was endowed with no light, beset by no apprehension regarding the outcome of events. The mysteries of the catechism appeared to me infantile. Like all Catholics, I was, moreover, in

absolute ignorance so far as my own religion was concerned. I did not take into account the fact that everything is mysterious, that we live only in mystery, and that if such a thing as chance existed, it would be still more mysterious than Providence. I could not admit the idea of suffering, inflicted by a just God, but was foolish enough to imagine that Pessimism could be the consolation of heroic souls. What a stupidity! It was this creed which was a failure as an experiment, as a human document, if I may make use of a term dear to Naturalism. Never has Pessimism consoled either sick bodies or bed-ridden souls!

I smile as, after so many years, I reread pages in which such theories, so stubbornly false, are set forth.

But what strikes me most, in the course of this reading, is this: all the novels which I have written since *A Rebours* are contained, in germ, in the latter book, the chapters of which are, indeed, but tinder for the volumes that follow.

As to the chapter on the Latin literature of the decadence, if I have not expanded it, I have at least given it a more profound treatment, in the passages on the liturgy in *En Route* and *L'Oblat*. I would reprint it today, without any change, except for Saint Ambrose, for whose aqueous prose and tumid rhetoric I have not always cared. He would impress me, still, as being just what I called him: "a wearisome Christian Cicero," if it were not that the poet in him is charming; his hymns and those of his school, which are to be found in the Breviary, are among the most

P R E F A C E

beautiful that the Church has preserved. I may add, also, that the somewhat specialized literature of the hymnal would now find a place in this chapter.

I am no fonder at present than I was in 1884 of the classic Latin of Maro and the Chick Pea. As at the time of *A Rebours*, I still prefer the language of the Vulgate to that of Augustus' century, even to that of the Decadence, though the latter is more curious, with its flavor of wildfowl and its tints of tainted venison. The Church, after having disinfected and rejuvenated this idiom, proceeded to create in it, in order to attack an order of ideas not before expressed, a number of eloquent vocables and diminutives of an exquisite tenderness. In so doing, it seems to me, She has fashioned a language far superior to the dialect of Paganism, and Durtal's opinion on this subject is the same as that of Des Esseintes'.

The chapter on precious stones I have carried on in *La Cathedrale*, being concerned there with the symbolism of gems. In doing so, I have, merely, animated the dead stones of *A Rebours*. Surely, I should not deny that a fine emerald might be admired alone for its green and sparkling fire, but if one does not know the idiom of symbolism, does not this stone remain a taciturn stranger, with whom one cannot enter into conversation, for the reason that one does not understand its mode of speech? It is, of a truth, much more—and better—than it seems.

Without admitting, in agreement with an old author or the 16th century, Estienne de Clave, that

DOWN STREAM

precious stones, like persons, are engendered from a semen scattered in the matrix of the earth, one may, nevertheless, quite rightly assert that they are significant minerals and loquacious substances—in a word, that they are symbols. They have been envisaged under this aspect since the most remote antiquity, though the tropology of gems is one of the branches of Christian symbolism which has been utterly forgotten by the priesthood and laity of our day; I have endeavored to reconstruct this science, in its chief outlines, in my work on the basilica of Chartres.

The chapter in *A Rebours* is, therefore, superficial—merely the shell of the nut. It is not, as it ought to be, a metaphysical jewelry store. It is made up of caskets fairly well labeled, fairly well ranged in the show-case, but that is all, and that is not enough.

The paintings of Gustave Moreau, the engravings of Luyken and the lithographs of Bresdin and Redon are set forth as I still see them. I have no change to make in the arrangement of this little museum.

As to that terrible Sixth Chapter, the numeral of which, corresponds, without forethought, to that of the Commandment of God against which the chapter sins,* as well as certain parts of the Ninth Chapter, which may be included with it, I, obviously, should not write these passages in the same manner today. It would be necessary, at least, to explain what is there described in more studious fashion, by that diabolic perversity which, especially from the point of view of

*Our Seventh Commandment.

P R E F A C E

lust, obtrudes itself into exhausted brains. It would seem, of a truth, that the diseases of the nerves, the neuroses, open up in the soul certain fissures through which the Spirit of Evil is enabled to enter. There is, here, an enigma which remains unelucidated. The word hysteria solves nothing; it may suffice to indicate, with some precision, a physical state, in observing the irresistible rumors of the senses, but it does not deduce the spiritual consequences that follow and, more especially, the sins of dissimulation and of lying, which almost always are grafted to the parent stock. What are the confines of this sinful malady, and to what degree is a creature to be held responsible whose soul is tainted with a sort of possession, ingrafted upon his unfortunate body? No one knows; on this subject, medicine talks nonsense, and theology is silent.

In the obvious absence of any solution which he could accept, Des Esseintes should have considered the question from the point of view of error and should have expressed, in any case, some regret. He abstains from reviling himself, and in this he is wrong. But though reared by the Jesuits, whom he praises even more than does Durtal, he had ended by becoming a rebel against divine constraint of any sort, resolutely bent on floundering in his carnal slime.

However this may be, these chapters appear to be landmarks, unconsciously erected to indicate the way for *Là-Bas*. It is to be remarked, also, that the library of Des Esseintes contained a certain number of old

books on magic, and that the ideas on sacrilege, set forth in the Seventh Chapter of *A Rebours*, are but bait for a future volume, treating this subject more profoundly.

As to that book, *Là-Bas*, which has scared so many good folk, I should no longer, now that I have become a Catholic, write it, either, in the same manner. There is no doubt that the criminal and sensual side of the subject which is there elaborated is reprehensible; and yet, I maintain, I have covered the whole subject with gauze; I have, in reality, told nothing. The documents which it contains are, by comparison with those which I have omitted, but which I possess in my archives, merely stale plums and insipid confections!

I believe, nevertheless, that this work, despite its cerebral aberrations, despite its alvine frenzies, has, by its very subject-matter, served its purpose. It has called attention to those manoeuvrings of the Evil One which many had come to deny; it has been the point of departure for all the fresh studies that have been made regarding the eternal processes of satanism. It has aided, by unveiling them, in the annihilation of the odious practices of sorcery. In short, it has taken sides with the Church and fought for Her, stoutly, against the Demon.

To come back to *A Rebours*, of which *Là-Bas* is but a succedaneum, I may repeat, à propos of flowers, what I have already said concerning stones.

A Rebours considers them only from the point of view of outline and hue, but not at all from the point

PREFACE

of view of their hidden meanings. Des Esseintes chose only bizarre, but silent, orchids. It may be added that it would have been difficult, in this book, to give words to a soot-soiled and silent flora, for the symbolic idiom of plants is dead with the Middle Ages, and the vegetable creoles which Des Esseintes so loved were unknown to the allegorists of that age.

The counterpart of this botany I have since written in *La Cathédrale*, à propos of that liturgical horticulture which has inspired so many curious pages on the part of Saint Hildegard, Saint Meliton and Saint Eucher.

The question of odors, the mystic emblematicalness of which I have unveiled in the same book, is a different one.

Des Esseintes is only concerned with lay perfumes, simple scents or extracts, and profane perfumes, compounded or in bouquet.

He might have experimented also with the aromas of the Church, with incense, myrrh and that strange Thymiama, which the Bible refers to, and which is still indicated in the ritual, as formerly, for burning under bells at the time of their baptism, after the Bishop has sprinkled them with holy water and made over them the sign of the cross, with the Holy Chrism and the oil of the sick. But this fragrance would seem to have been forgotten by the Church herself, and I fancy one could not possibly create greater astonishment in a curate than by asking him for a little Thymiama.

DOWN STREAM

And yet, the recipe is given in *Exodus*. Thymiamma is composed of storax, of galbanum and of onycha; and this last substance could have been none other than the operculum of a certain shell-fish, of the sort commonly known as "purple-fish," which is dredged up in the swamps of the Indies.

Now, it is difficult, not to say impossible, being furnished with an incomplete description of this fish and its place of origin, to prepare an authentic Thymiamma; and this fact is to be regretted, for otherwise, this perfume would, assuredly, have excited Des Esseintes to sumptuous evocations of ceremonial pomps and the liturgic rites of the Orient.

As to the chapters on contemporary literature, both lay literature and religious, they have, in my opinion, like those on Latin literature, preserved their value. The one on profane art has aided in bringing to public notice a number of poets who were unknown theretofore: Corbière, Mallarmé, Verlaine. I have nothing to retract here of what I wrote nineteen years ago. I have preserved my admiration for all these writers, while that which I then professed for Verlaine has since grown. Arthur Rimbaud and Jules Laforgue would have deserved to figure in Des Esseintes' florilege, but they had printed nothing at that time, and it was not until much later that their works appeared.

For the rest, I do not imagine that I shall ever come to have a taste for those modern religious authors who are tumbled about in *A Rebours*. No one will ever be able to remove the idea from my mind that the criti-

P R E F A C E

cism of the late *Nettement* is idiotic, or that *Mme. Augustin Craven* and *Mlle. Eugénie Guerin* are a pair of lymphatic blue-stockings and devout old-maids. Their juleps are savorless to me; *Des Esseintes* has passed on to *Durtal* his taste for spices; and I believe both the writers mentioned have to grow a good deal yet in order to be able to give us, in place of their customary emulsions, a gingered essence of art.

I have not altered my opinion concerning the literature produced by the confraternity of *Poujoulat* and *Genoudes*, but I should be less hard now on *Père Chocarne*, quoted in a number of pious cacographies, for he has, at least, given us a number of pithy pages on mysticism, in his introduction to the works of *St. John of the Cross*, and I should also be a little more gentle toward *Montalembert*, who, while lacking talent, has supplied us with a work, incoherent and uneven, but touching, on the monks. I, especially, should not now assert that the visions of *Angelo di Foligno* are weak and watery; it is the contrary that is true; but I must testify, in my own defense, that I had read him only in the translation of *Hello*. Now, the latter was possessed of a mania for lopping off,edulcorating and white-washing the mystics, from fear of offending the false modesty of Catholics. He puts into his wine-press a work that is ardent and full of sap, and he extracts from it nothing but a cold and colorless juice, badly rewarmed in a frying-pan over the feeble night-lamp of his style.

But if, as a translator, *Hello* revealed himself as a

mollycoddle and a pietist, it is only just to add that when working on his own account, he was an original handler of ideas, a perspicacious exegetist and a truly powerful analyst. He was, among the writers of his group, the only one who did any thinking. I came to the rescue of d'Aurevilly in crying up the work of this writer, who is so incomplete but so interesting; and *A Rebours* has, I think, aided in the little success which his best book, *L'Homme*, has attained since his death.

The conclusion reached in this chapter on modern ecclesiastical literature was to the effect that, among all the geldings of religious art, there was but one stallion, Barbey d'Aurevilly; and this opinion remains absolutely unshaken. He was the first artist, in the pure sense of the word, which the Catholicism of our age produced. He was a great prosateur, an admirable novelist, whose audacity made the tribe of beadles bray from exasperation at the explosive vehemence of his phrases.

Finally, if any chapter might be looked upon as the point of departure for other books, it was, surely, the one on the plain song, which I have amplified since, in all my books, especially in *En Route* and *L'Oblat*.

After this brief review of the novelties ranged in the show-cases of *A Rebours*, the inevitable conclusion is: this book was but the percussion-cap for all my subsequent Catholic work, all of which is to be discovered, in embryo, in this volume.

P R E F A C E

The stupid lack of comprehension on the part of certain agitated mummers of the priesthood is still unfathomable to me. They have demanded for a number of years, the destruction of this work, in which, by the way, I do not possess the property-rights, without taking account of the fact that the mystic volumes which follow it are incomprehensible without it, for this book is, I repeat, the stem from which all the others spring. How, moreover, is one to appreciate, in its entirety, the work of a writer, if one does not take him from his beginnings, if one does not follow him step by step; how, above all, is one to form an idea of the progress of grace in a soul, if one suppresses all traces of its passage, if one effaces the first footprints it has left?

The thing that is certain is that *A Rebours* broke with the novels preceding it, with *Les Soeurs*, *Vatard*, *En Ménage* and *A vau-l'Eau*, forcing me into a new path of which I myself did not suspect the outcome.

Wiser in this matter than the Catholics, Zola perceived it clearly enough. I recall that, after the appearance of *A Rebours*, I went to pass a few days at Médan. One afternoon, while we were walking together in the country, he drew up brusquely and, with darkening eye, began to reproach me on account of the book, saying that I had dealt a terrible blow to Naturalism, that I had caused the school to deviate and that, moreover, I was simply burning my bridges with a novel like that, since no sort of literature was possible in a species capable of being exhausted in a

single volume. And, in quite a friendly fashion—for he was a very fine chap—he exhorted me to return to the beaten path and to harness myself to the task of writing a study of manners.

I listened to him, reflecting that he was, at once, both right and wrong—right, in accusing me of having undermined Naturalism and with having shut off my own path, wrong, in the sense that the novel as he conceived it impressed me as being moribund, worn out with repetitions—in any event, wholly without interest for me.

There were many things which Zola was incapable of understanding. First of all, the need I experienced of opening the windows, of fleeing an environment in which I was stifling. Secondly, the desire that was strong in me to overthrow prejudices and break down the barriers of the novel, to bring into it art, science, history—in a word, not to make use of this form any longer, except as a frame in which to insert more serious works. As for myself, the thing I was particularly bent upon at this period was a suppression of the traditional intrigue, a suppression, even, of passion, of woman, with an enlightened concentration of my brush upon one single character—with the determination to achieve, at any price, something new.

Zola did not reply to the arguments with which I endeavored to convince him, but kept on reiterating, incessantly, his affirmation: "I do not admit that one can change his manner of writing and his views; I do not admit that one can burn what he has worshiped."

PREFACE

But did he not, himself, play the rôle of the good Sicambrian? If, as a matter of fact, he has not modified his manner of composition and of writing, he has, at least, varied his manner of conceiving humanity and of explaining life. After the black pessimism of his first books, have we not had, under color of socialism, the sanctimonious optimism of his later ones?

It must be admitted that no one has less of an understanding of the human soul than do the Naturalists, who set themselves the task of observing it. They see life as all of one piece; they accept it only as conditioned by likelihood; but I have since learned, from experience, that the unlikely is not always, in this world, an exceptional state of affairs, and that the adventures of a Rocambole are sometimes as true as those of a Gervaise or a Coupeau.*

* * * *

IN THESE few pages, I have spoken, up to now, of *A Rebours* from the literary and artistic point of view. I must now speak of it from the point of view of Divine Grace, with the object of showing how great an element of the unknown, what a projection of soul-states there may sometimes be in a book.

This orientation toward Catholicism, which is so clear, so marked, in *A Rebours*, remains for me, I must confess, incomprehensible.

I was not educated in a church school, but in a *lycée*, I was never pious in my youth, and childhood memories—of first communion and of education—

*The asterisks occur in the original.

which play, frequently, so large a part in a conversion, had no place in my own. And what makes the matter more difficult and sidetracks all analysis is that, at the time I wrote *A Rebours*, I had not set foot in an ecclesiastical edifice, I knew no communicating Catholic, no priest, and I felt not the slightest touch of Grace inciting me to direct my steps toward the Church. I lived tranquilly in my trough, it seemed to me wholly natural to satisfy the desires of my senses, and the thought did not even occur to me that this sort of sport was forbidden.

A Rebours appeared in 1884, and I left for a Trappist monastery in 1892. Nearly eight years had elapsed before the seed sown in this book had borne fruit. Allow two years, three even, for the work of Grace—silent, obstinate, sometimes perceptible—and there would remain not less than five years, during which, as I remember, I felt within me not the least Catholic velleity, not the least regret for the life I was leading, not the least desire to reverse that life. Why, then, and how was it that I came to find myself embarked upon a path which, up to that time, had been lost for me in the darkness of night? This is a question I am utterly incapable of answering; I do not know, unless it was the prayers ascending from convent and cloister and from a certain very pious Dutch family with which I was barely acquainted—I do not know what else there is to explain the absolute unconsciousness of that last cry, the religious appeal that is to be found on the last page of *A Rebours*.

P R E F A C E

Yes, I know very well, there are certain strong ones who draw up plans, organize their life-itineraries in advance, and then follow them; it may even be granted, if I mistake not, that with will-power one may get anywhere. I like to believe all this; but for myself, I must confess, I have never been either a tenacious individual or a crafty author. There has been, in my life and in my literary output, an element of passiveness, of the unknown, of a very certain direction, coming from somewhere outside myself.

Providence was merciful to me and the Virgin was good. I simply bound myself not to thwart them, once their intentions were manifest. I have, simply, obeyed; I have been led by what are called "extraordinary means." If any one ever could have had a certitude of the nothing he would be without the aid of God, it was I.

Those without faith will object that, with such ideas, one is not far from ending up in fatalism and a negation of all psychology.

No, for faith in Our Lord is not fatalism. Free will remains intact. I might, had it pleased me, have continued to yield to wanton impulses and stayed in Paris, instead of going to suffer in a Trappist monastery. God, undoubtedly, would not have insisted. But while maintaining that the will is intact, one must, still, admit that the Savior injects a good deal of his own will, that he harasses and hunts you down, that he gives you the "third degree," to make use of a police term. But, I repeat it once more, it is at his own risk

and peril that one gives the Master his walking papers.

As for psychology, that is something else. If we see it, as I see it, from the point of view of a conversion, it is, in the early stages, impossible to fathom. There are certain edges, it may be, which are tangible, but the subterranean travail of the soul eludes us. There was, undoubtedly, at the moment I was writing *A Rebours*, a certain commotion of the earth, a drilling of the soil, in order that foundations of which I knew nothing might be planted. God was hollowing it out for the dropping of his plumbline, and he works only by night, in the shadows of the soul. Nothing was perceptible; it was not until a good many years afterward that the spark commenced to run along the wire. I felt then certain spiritual concussions which were, as yet, neither very painful nor very clear. Liturgy, mysticism, art were the vehicles or the means. What happened generally took place in the churches, particularly in Saint-Severin, which I was in the habit of entering from curiosity and from want of anything better to do. I experienced, upon taking part in the ceremonies, nothing beyond an interior trepidation, that slight trembling sensation which one feels upon seeing, hearing or reading a fine work of art; but there was no precise attack, no summons to declare myself. I simply detached myself, little by little, from my shell of impurity; I began to be disgusted with myself; but I still turned up my nose at the Articles of Faith. The objections which I raised appeared to me to be

PREFACE

irrefutable; and then, one fine morning, upon awakening, without my ever knowing how, they were gone. I prayed for the first time, and the explosion had occurred.

All this may well seem insane to those who do not believe in Divine Grace. But for those who have felt its effects, no astonishment is possible. And if there is any feeling of surprise, it can exist only during the period of incubation, when one sees nothing and perceives nothing, the period of clearing away débris and laying foundations, all of which one does not even suspect.

I understand, in short, up to a certain point, what took place between the years 1891 and 1895, between *Là-Bas* and *En Route*, nothing at all of what took place between 1884 and 1891, between *A Rebours* and *Là-Bas*.

If I myself have not been able to understand them, there is all the more reason why others should fail to comprehend the impulses of Des Esseintes. *A Rebours* fell like an aerolith into the literary fair, producing, at once, stupefaction and wrath. The press was thrown into confusion; never were there so many vaguely raving articles. After having termed me a literary misanthrope, and after having described Des Esseintes as a combination of maniac and imbecile, the Normal School professors, like M. Lemaitre, grew indignant because I had not praised Virgil and announced, in a peremptory tone, that the decadent Latin writers of the Middle Ages were but "driveling morons." Other

DOWN STREAM

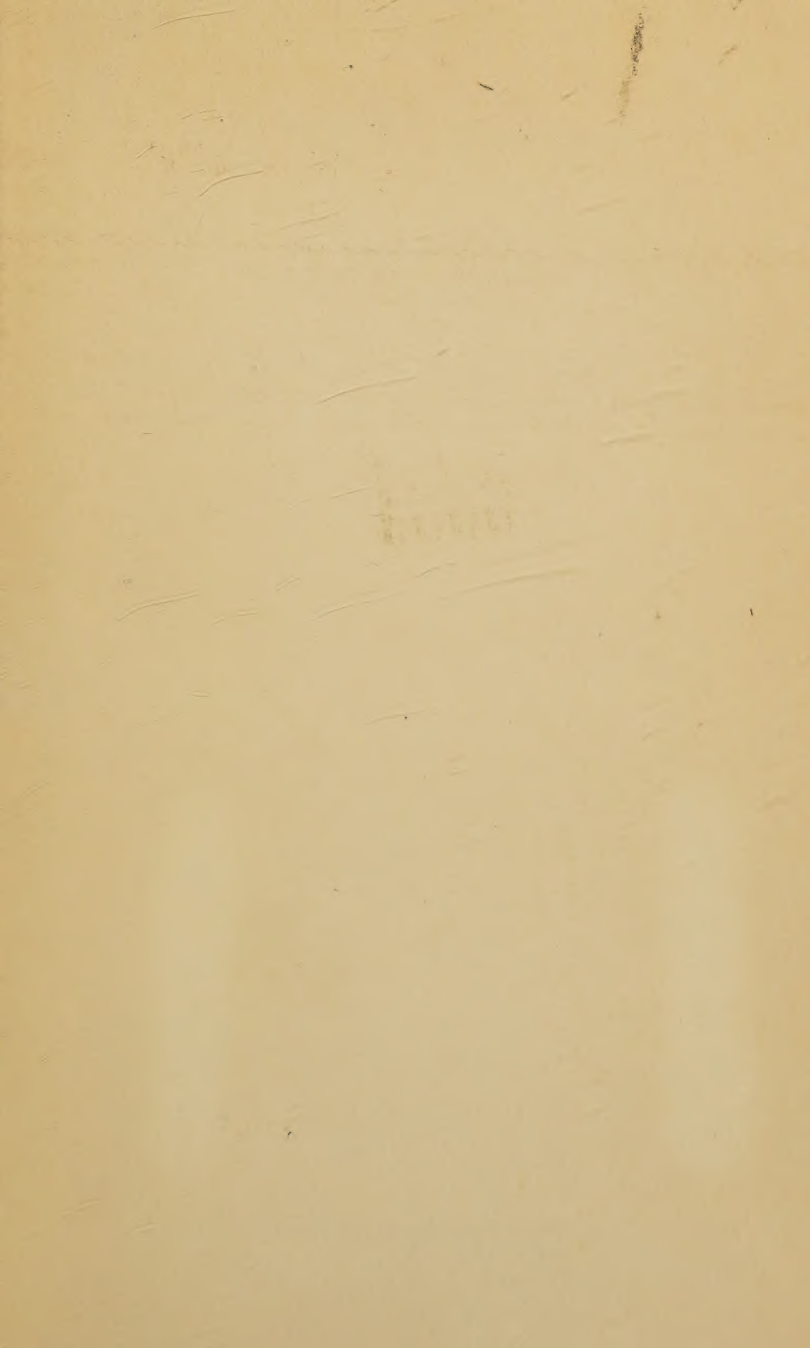
middlemen of criticism endeavored to advise me that it would be to my advantage to take a few shower-baths in a thermal prison. And then, in their turn, the public lecturers mixed in. At the Salle des Capucins, the archon, Sarcey, cried out in amazement: "I hope I may be hanged, if I understand a single false word of this novel!" Finally, to complete the comedy, grave reviews, like the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, assigned their leader, M. Brunetiere, to compare my novel to the vaudeville shows of Wafard and Fulgence.

In all this hubbub, one writer alone saw clearly. That was Barbey d'Aurevilly, who had no personal acquaintance with me whatever. In an article in the *Constitutionnel*, under date of the 28th of July, 1884, an article which has since been included in his volume, *Le Roman contemporain* (published in 1902), he wrote:

"After such a book, it only remains for the author to choose between the mouth of a pistol and the foot of the cross."

That is what I did.

J. K. HUYSMANS
(1903)



PQ2309
•H4A662

253971

ST. OLAF COLLEGE

PQ2309.H4 A662

Huysmans, Joris - Down stream A vau-l'eau and ot



3 0111 00256 6031